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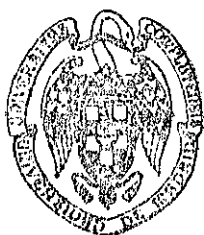


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UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE

*THE FUNCTIONS AND STRATEGIES  
OF IRONIC DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS*

Tesis doctoral presentada por:

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*TO MY HUSBAND, GUSTAVO, AND MY SON, JOAQUIN.*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED

LLC: LONDON LUND CORPUS                    GG: THE GOLDEN GIRLS CORPUS  
YM: YES, MINISTER CORPUS                BR: BERTRAND RUSSELL CORPUS  
NA: CORPUS CONTAINING NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

### NOTATION IN THE LONDON LUND CORPUS

#### A) PROSODY

#            End of tone group                    ^Yes    Beginning of tone group

#### TONES:

Y\es	FALL	Y\/es	FALL-RISE	Y=es	LEVEL
Y/es	RISE	Y/\es	RISE-FALL		

#### PITCH:

:Yes    Higher than the previous syllable

!Yes    High                                        !!Yes    Very high

#### STRESS:

'Yes    Normal                                        "Yes    Strong

#### PAUSES:

Yes - -    Each dash is a unit pause of one stress unit or "foot".

Yes +    Brief pause

#### B) SPEAKERS

A    Speaker identity

(A)    Speaker continues where he left off

A, B    A and B

VAR    Various speakers

?    Speaker identity unknown

a    (low case letter) Non-surreptitious speaker

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

<<"Do you mean that you think you can find the answer to it?" said the March Hare.  
"Exactly so", said Alice.  
"Then you should say what you mean?" The March Hare went on.  
"I do." Alice hastily replied; "At least I mean what I say - That's the same thing, you know."  
"Not the same thing a bit!" said the latter.>>

L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

<<So the ironist is negatively free; he is not bound by what he says; albeit he isn't exactly unbound by it.>>

D.J. Enright, *The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony*

### 1.1 Preliminary considerations

To do research on, or to study irony sooner or later becomes an ironic enterprise. For the more one analyses it, the less one knows about it or the less possible it is to "grasp" the concept and put it within a frame having clear and tidy boundaries. Notwithstanding, precisely this varied, multifarious and slippery nature of irony makes it a fascinating topic for research.

It would have been appropriate, perhaps, to start this dissertation by giving a clear-cut definition of irony so as to be able to work on firm ground from the very beginning, but I am

---

afraid this would have been quite a chimerical start. As Roy (1978) notes, irony versus nonirony is not a binary distinction but rather a continuum. There is general agreement among ironic experts on how difficult it is to define this phenomenon. Many scholars do not agree on the subclasses within the main class; for instance, some of them will include sarcasm as a type of irony and some others will not; or some of these scholars will state that ironic utterances can only convey derision while others will also include utterances conveying praise.

Barbe (1995) notes that the discovery of conversational irony is based on very personal judgements and that many prejudices exist about irony. She devotes a chapter entitled "But that's not ironic" precisely to this disagreement about the judgement of ironic utterances. This difference of opinions when judging irony may sometimes be due to a lack of knowledge about the contextual factors surrounding ironic utterances or to a prejudiced or casual appreciation of it. Kaufer (1981) describes the possible cause of disagreement as to what irony is in the paragraph below. I agree with him in that the more one studies the phenomenon, the more one realizes that traditional or standard definitions do not show the complete picture and, therefore, that there is more to irony than what the uninitiated appreciator may think:

<<As with most intellectual topics, verbal irony has received careful attention from a few scholars and only passing attention (if that) from everyone else. Unlike most such topics, there is surprisingly little by way of what is known about irony to distinguish the ironic "expert" from the casual appreciator of irony. Whereas the casual appreciator makes sense of the

concept by appealing to the authority of standard definitions, the ironic "expert" usually has been able to claim little more than these definitions don't work>> (1981: 495).

The view adopted in this study will try to embrace as many occurrences of the phenomenon as possible. This entails considering both: a) instances of verbally ironic language having been classified as such by the scholars that have studied verbal irony in a serious and systematic manner, and b) the instances found in the corpora that do not fit any classification done before but which nevertheless do fit the characterisation (see 8.2) made of it herein on the basis of all previous studies. Thus, I will include examples in my analysis which show various and different manifestations of the phenomenon in question.

The approach of this study can not be said to adopt a traditional perspective. As will be explained further on, I will focus on verbal irony (as opposed to situational irony or any other of the kinds described in chapter 2), and I will adopt a wider, discourse-pragmatic viewpoint.

Irony has been the subject of study of different disciplines: it is a topic much debated among philosophers and literary experts, though not so much debated among linguists. Other traditionally called "tropes" or "figures of speech" such as metaphor, for instance, have been much more studied and scrutinised by linguists than irony. That is one of the reasons why the present study was carried out. I started with the aim of finding out more concrete data and results concerning the different types of verbal irony a speaker may use and understand,

as well as the pragmatic strategies and discourse functions that ironic users of English have at their disposal. Since Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis are by nature multidisciplinary, and so is the phenomenon of irony, the theoretical frameworks behind this study are several and interrelated. Thus, the classical approaches to irony as well as the psychological and the pragmatic approaches have been useful. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978), Sperber and Wilson's Echoic Theory (1981, 1984) and Relevance Theory (1986), Jakobson's (1960) and Halliday's (1976, 1978, 1985) functional view of language, Brown and Yule's (1983) views on Discourse Analysis and several other studies which touch on the topic of verbal irony have also been insightful for the different qualitative and quantitative analyses that are carried out all throughout this piece of research.

Irony underlies extremely diverse intellectual mechanisms. It is a general aim of this study to try to clarify and explain -to a certain extent- these mechanisms and to give at least some steps forward in order to understand why utterances as diverse as the following are labelled and interpreted as ironic:

- \* "I only know I know nothing." (Socrates)
- \* "A fine friend you are!" (when, for example, the friend does not want to do a favour for the speaker)
- \* So, they tell me you're a bad student! (said to a child who has just brought his report-card with very high grades)



- \* Break a leg! (said by an actor to another actor, before starting a performance to wish him good luck)
- \* Come on! Keep on eating with your hands! (said by a mother to her child when she wants him to use the fork or spoon)
- \* A: My boyfriend is the best looking man on earth.  
B: Yes, and I'm Mary the Queen of Romania. (said to mean that A's boyfriend is not goodlooking)

But these are only a few examples of how colourful and varied verbal irony may be. The examples found and analysed in the corpora used for this investigation will show us a greater number of possibilities.

Irony also plays an important part in the study of humour and indeed has much in common with it. Nash's (1985) characterization of humour in his book *The Language of Humour* could very well be applied to that of irony. He describes humour as:

<<A complex piece of equipment for living, a mode of attack and a line of defence, a method of raising questions and criticizing arguments, a protest against the inequality of the struggle to live, a way of atonement and reconciliation, a treaty with all that is willful, impaired, beyond our power to control.>>  
(1985: 1)

Irony being such a versatile phenomenon, many research questions were raised, which became the basis for the further formulation of the objectives and hypotheses of this study. I shall now proceed to present the research questions and the hypotheses.

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## 1.2 Research questions and hypotheses of this study

The first and the most general questions raised were the following:

How can verbal irony be better explained? What elements from the existing theories and from the pragmatic and discourse analysis approaches can help in the description and explanation of the phenomenon?

from which the main (general) hypothesis was derived:

Verbal irony is a complex phenomenon, which can not be explained in its totality by means of the existing theories. Its very essence lies in paradox and contradiction (which may be present at different levels); and the pragmatic concept of strategy, as well as the concept of discourse function, can help in its explanation and characterisation.

There are several other questions implicit in the main ones, which were made in the course of this investigation as it progressed in time and depth. From each of the questions, a research hypothesis was derived.

The qualitative and quantitative analyses made in the different chapters of this thesis will all be aimed at the testing of the different hypotheses. In most cases, a statistical test will also be carried out. I shall specify which test will be used when referring to each hypothesis.

The specific questions and hypotheses are the following:

-Research question n° 1:

Does a user of verbal irony always mean the opposite of the proposition expressed by the literal meaning of his/her utterance or contribution?

- Research hypothesis n° 1:

When being ironic, a speaker/writer does not always mean the opposite of the proposition expressed by the literal meaning of his/her utterance. Even more, the frequency of occurrence of the non-proposition oriented cases of verbal irony is greater than that of the proposition-oriented ones.

The statistical Median Test will be applied to the appropriate data in order to have solid foundations for the acceptance or rejection of this hypothesis. The results of the test will show whether the frequency of occurrence of the non proposition-oriented instances of irony is greater than that of the proposition-oriented counterpart.

- Research question n° 2:

Can verbal irony sometimes be conveyed by conventional implicature?. In other words, is there a conventional or conventionalised type of irony?

- Research hypothesis n° 2:

Verbal irony can be conveyed not only through conversational implicature, but also through conventional implicature. There exists a type of irony that can be said to be "implicature-free" (i.e., not conveyed by means of conversational implicatures), and another type which can be called the "conventionalised" type (in which the implicature has been short-circuited).

If the data allows for the acceptance of the existence of these three types of irony (conversational, conventionalised and implicature-free), the Chi-squared test ( $\chi^2$ ) will be applied in order to see if there are significant differences in the frequency of occurrence of these three types of verbal irony, and to compare the relative frequencies of each of the types.

- Research question n° 3:

Can verbal irony manifest itself at the illocutionary level of the speech act, through all types of speech acts, including those of the declarative type?

- Research hypothesis n° 3:

Verbal irony manifests itself not only at the propositional level but also at the illocutionary level of the speech act, and it can even be expressed through declarative (performative) speech acts. There is, therefore, a speech act-oriented type of verbal irony.

The statistical analysis ( $\chi^2$  test) will tell us whether the occurrence of the speech act-oriented type of irony is more or less frequent than the non-speech act-oriented counterpart, as well as whether the frequencies of occurrence of these two types vary from the spoken corpora to the written one.

- Research question n° 4:

Are all ironic utterances instances of echoic mention or interpretation?

- Research hypothesis n° 4:

Not all ironic utterances are instances of echoic mention or interpretation. There is an echoic and a non-echoic type of verbal irony, and the frequency of occurrence of these two types is different for the different corpora analysed.

The statistical test of the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) will be carried out in order to accept or reject this hypothesis, as well as to compare the frequencies of occurrence for both the spoken and the written corpora.

- Research question n° 5:

Do all instances of ironic discourse convey a derogatory attitude on the part of the speaker/writer?

- Research hypothesis n° 5:

Not all instances of ironic discourse convey a derogatory attitude on the part of the speaker/writer. The Negative type of verbal irony does convey such an attitude, but there are also two other main kinds of irony, namely, Positive and Neutral, in which the attitude of the user of irony is not derogatory at all.

As with all the other hypotheses, the qualitative and quantitative analyses will try to give evidence for this hypothesis. In this particular case, the Kruskal Wallis Test will be carried out in order to find out whether there are significant differences in the frequencies of occurrence of these three types of verbal irony.

- Research question n° 6:

Are all ironic utterances instances of pretence?

- Research Hypothesis n° 6:

Not all ironic utterances are instances of pretence. Even more, the frequency of occurrence of the non-pretence instances of verbal irony is higher than the frequency of occurrence of the pretence ones.

The chi-squared test will be applied for the acceptance or rejection of this hypothesis.

- Research question n° 7:

Can the ironic speakers/writers violate all the Maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principle?

- Research hypothesis n° 7:

An ironic speaker/writer can not only violate the Quantity Maxim, but also the other three Gricean Maxims.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis will be considered

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enough for the acceptance of this hypothesis (see chapter 7).

- Research question n° 8:

Can an ironic speaker/writer make use of both off record and on record strategies (as described by Brown & Levinson, 1978) to make his/her point?

- Research hypothesis n° 8:

An ironic speaker/writer can make use not only of off record strategies but also of on record ones to make his point. The frequency of occurrence of the former strategies is higher than that of the latter, but this does not deny the existence of the latter.

The chi-squared test will be applied to the pertinent data to find out if the frequencies of occurrence of these two variables (on record and off record) is similar or different for the different corpora analysed.

- Research question n° 9:

Can a speaker/writer make different off record strategies co-occur in order to convey an ironic meaning?

- Research hypothesis n° 9:

A speaker/writer can make different off record strategies co-occur in order to convey an ironic meaning

No statistical tests will be carried out here.

- Research question n° 10:

Do the sociological variables P (power), D (distance) and R (ranking of imposition of the culture) have any influence upon the use of verbal irony?

- Research hypothesis n° 10:

The sociological variables P, D and R influence the use of verbal irony.

This hypothesis is the only one that will not be analysed quantitatively. Qualitative evidence for its acceptance will be given in Chapter 5 (5.5), but its quantitative analysis is considered to be beyond the scope of this study.

- Research question n° 11:

Is there a specific tone (fall, rise, etc.) used exclusively in ironic utterances? What other prosodic features intervene in the so-called "ironic tone of voice"?

- Research hypothesis n° 11:

There is no specific tone used exclusively for ironic utterances. Nevertheless, the frequency of use of the different tones within ironic discourse is different from the frequency of use of these tones in non-ironic discourse. Intonation and other prosodic features (such as pitch level, laughter, etc.) work together to conform the so-called "ironic tone of voice" and the use of these features constitutes only one more of the possible strategies ironic speakers have at their disposal.

The chi-squared test will be applied here for the comparison between ironic and non-ironic discourse.

- Research question n° 12:

What are the strategies used by ironic speakers/writers?

- Research hypothesis n° 12:

Verbal irony is a super-strategy which is subdivided in three main kinds (Positive, Negative and Neutral), which in turn can be carried out by using different pragmatic sub-strategies such as "joke", "use the opposite proposition to the one intended", "use a different speech-act from the one intended", "echo someone's previous utterance or thought", etc..

The chi-squared test will be carried out in order to find out whether or not there are significant differences in the

frequencies of occurrence of the different strategies for the different corpora.

- Research question n° 13:

What are the functions of verbal irony?

- Research hypothesis n° 13:

Speakers/writers of English use verbal irony in order to fulfill the main functions of EVALUATION, VERBAL ATTACK and/or AMUSEMENT. Other more specific discourse functions may be fulfilled at the same time, such as "Topic closure", "Topic conclusion", "Reproach", "Complaint", etc.

The chi-squared and Kruskal-Wallis tests will be applied to the numerical data obtained, in order to find out whether the frequencies of occurrence of both the general and the specific functions vary for the different corpora analysed, as well as for the spoken and the written corpora.

Each of the chapters in this study intends to give an answer to one or more of the above questions and to test one or more of the hypotheses in both a qualitative and a quantitative manner. The only hypothesis that has not been tested quantitatively is Research hypothesis n° 10, for, as was noted above and will be explained in chapter 5, it was thought to be beyond the scope of this work (the qualitative analysis of several examples from the corpora used in this piece of research was considered sufficient to show some of the ways in which the sociological variables may influence the use of verbal irony).

Both the research questions and hypotheses are closely



related to the objectives of this study, to which I now turn.

### 1.3 Objectives of this study

The general aim or objective of this study is to make a corpus-based analysis of the phenomenon of verbal irony, in order to identify its possible modes of occurrence as well as to classify the pragmatic strategies and discourse functions used by irony users. The specific objectives, which have to do with the specific questions and hypotheses put forward in 1.2, are the following:

A) To determine:

- 1- whether or not it is always the case (as traditional theories put it) that an ironic writer/speaker conveys the opposite of the literal meaning of his/her proposition;
- 2- whether or not verbal irony can also be conveyed through conventional implicature and not only through conversational implicature;
- 3- whether or not verbal irony can manifest itself at the illocutionary level of the speech act, and, if so, through what type of speech acts;
- 4- whether or not all ironic utterances are instances of echoic mention or interpretation;
- 5- whether or not all instances of verbal irony convey a derogatory attitude on the part of the speaker/writer;
- 6- whether or not all ironic utterances are instances of pretence;

7- whether or not ironic speakers/writers can violate not only the Gricean Maxim of Quality but also the Maxims of Manner, Quantity and Relevance;

8- whether or not an ironic speaker/writer can make the different off record strategies co-occur in order to make his/her point;

9- whether or not the sociological variables P, D and R have any influence upon the use of verbal irony;

10- whether or not there is a specific tone characteristic of ironic utterances, whether or not the frequencies of occurrence of the different tones are different if both the ironic and the non-ironic types of discourse are compared, and what other prosodic features may co-occur with intonation to produce the so-called "ironic tone of voice";

B) to provide:

1- a taxonomy or classification of the pragmatic strategies used by ironic speakers/writers of English;

2- a typology or classification of the discourse functions of verbal irony;

C) to make a quantitative analysis of:

1- the occurrence of the different prosodic features and their possibilities of combination in the pieces of ironic discourse found in the corpora used for the analysis;

2- the frequencies of occurrence of the different types of verbal irony resulting from the corpus analysis of the phenomenon in the light of the different theories approaching the problem;

3- the frequencies of occurrence of the different strategies identified and classified in the corpora analysed, as well as an analysis of their possibilities of combination;

4- the occurrence of the different discourse functions identified in the ironic instances found in the corpora used for this study.

#### 1.4 Research method and corpora used for the analysis

Any kind of research or systematic process of inquiry consists of three components: 1) a question, problem, or hypothesis; 2) data and 3) analysis and interpretation of data (Nunan, 1992:3). I have already presented the questions and the hypotheses. I shall now refer to the second component of research, namely, the data.

##### 1.4.1 Data

The data used for the analysis in this study consists of five different corpora of the English language. Three of them contain spoken language and two of them written language. These five corpora are the following: 1) the *London Lund Corpus of English Conversation* (Svartvik and Quirk, 1980), 2) ten episodes of *The Golden Girls* television series, 3) five episodes of the *"Yes, Minister"* television series, 4) a book containing excerpts from Bertrand Russell's works, and 5) a collection of newspaper articles published in different American and British newspapers. I shall refer to each of them separately:

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1) LONDON LUND CORPUS: This corpus is a computerised corpus of English, and it consists of 87 texts, each of 500 words (approximately). These texts are arranged in text groups, namely, a) face-to-face conversation, b) telephone conversation, c) discussion, interview, debate, c) discussion, interview, debate, d) public, unprepared commentary, demonstration, oration, and 5) public, prepared oration (priests' sermons and mass). Most of the texts contain "subtexts" in them; for instance, one text labelled "telephone conversation" may include two, three or more different telephone conversations in it. For the analysis carried out herein, twenty of the 87 texts were chosen on a random basis. These texts contain 64 subtexts. Of these, 35 are private telephone conversations, 19 are face-to-face conversations, 5 are instances of radio discussion, debate, interview or sports comment, 4 are instances of "public, prepared oration" and one of them contains legal discourse (public, unprepared legal discourse). All these texts were examined for examples of ironic discourse and 86 instances of verbal irony were identified, all of which have been used as variables in the analysis. Following is more detailed information about the texts (with the subtexts they contain) as well as about the speakers and year of recording. This information is not available for some of the texts, and this is one of the problems researchers encounter when working with the London Lund Corpus: there is not enough information about the speakers and the relationships among them. Furthermore (and this will be better explained in chapter 6), there are some prosodic features that have been omitted (a

fact that hindered part of the prosodic analysis in this study).

Data about speakers in the London Lund Corpus (LLC)

The speakers are all British, and educated to University level. Recording was surreptitious.

Non-surreptitious speakers have been specially designated by lower case letters.

TEXT S.1.1 (1964) Face-to-face conversation

A: male academic, age c. 44      B: male academic, age c. 60

TEXT S.1.2 (1963) Face-to-face conversation

A: male academic, age c. 43      B: male academic, age c. 42

S.1.2.a (1965)

A: male academic, age c. 45      B: male academic, age 41      CAL: telephone caller

S.1.2.b (1965)

A: male academic, age 45      B: male academic, age 36

TEXT S.1.4 (1969) Face-to-face conversation

A: male academic, age c. 48      B: male academic, age c. 48

TEXT S.1.5 (1967) Face-to-face conversation

A: female secretary, age c. 21      B: female academic, age c. 25      C: female secretary, age c. 35

D: female secretary, age c. 21

TEXT S.1.6 (1964) Face-to-face conversation

A: female academic, age 45      B: male academic, age 28

TEXT S.1.8 (1969) Face-to-face conversation

A: female academic, age c. 55      B: female academic, age c. 50      C: female academic, age c. 23

TEXT S.2.1 (1963) Face-to-face conversation

A: male academic, age 43      B: male academic, age 34

S.2.1.a (1953)

a: male academic, age 43      B: male academic, age 25

S.2.1.b (1953)

a: male academic, age 33      B: male academic, age 25

TEXT S.3.1 (1970) Face-to-face conversation

S.3.1.a (1970)

a: male academic, age 40      A: female prospective undergraduate, age 20      B: male academic, age 40

S.3.1.b (1970)

a: male academic, age 40      A: female prospective undergraduate, age 20      B: male academic, age 40

TEXT S.3.2 Face-to-face conversation

S.3.2.a (1973)

A: male academic, age c. 52      B: female ex-research assistant, age c. 30

S.3.2.b (1974)

A: male academic (former employer), age 54      B: male academic, (former employee), age 28

S.3.2.c (1975)

A: male academic, age c. 50

B: female academic, age c. 30

TEXT S.3.3 (1971) Face-to-face conversation

A: male administrator, age c. 55 B: (BH) male undergraduate student, age c. 20

C: (CF) female undergraduate student, age c. 20 D: (DM) male undergraduate student, age c. 20

E: (EF) female undergraduate student, age c. 20 F: (GH) male undergraduate student, age c. 20

TEXT S.3.4 (1975) Face-to-face conversation

A: male administrator, age c. 55 B: male academic, age 45-60 C: male academic, age 45-60

D: male academic, age 45-60 E: male academic, age 45-60 F: male academic, age 45-60

TEXT S.4.1 Face-to-face conversation

a & b = a couple (No more information about the speakers is given)

TEXT S.5.1 Discussion, interview, debate, radio (face-to-face)

(No information about the speakers is provided)

TEXT S.6.1 Discussion, interview, debate, radio (face-to-face)

S.6.1.a

S.6.1.b

S.6.1.c

TEXT S.7.1 Telephone conversation (dialogue, private, surreptitious)

S.7.1.a b: male C: female

S.7.1.b

S.7.1.c (No information about the speakers is provided)

S.7.1.d

S.7.1.e

TEXT S.8.1 Telephone conversation

S.8.1.a A: female B: male

S.8.1.b A: male B: female

S.8.1.c A: secretary B: secretary C: female assistant

S.8.1.d

S.8.1.e

S.8.1.e (No information provided)

S.8.1.f

S.8.1.g

S.8.1.h B: female secretary C: female secretary

S.8.1.i

S.8.1.j

S.8.1.k

S.8.1.l (No information provided)

S.8.1.m

S.8.1.n

S.8.1.o

S.8.1.p C: male B: male doctor

TEXT S.9.1 Telephone conversation

S.9.1.a

S.9.1.b (No information provided)

S.9.1.c

S.9.1.d

S.9.1.e  
 S.9.1.f  
 S.9.1.g  
 S.9.1.h (No information provided)  
 S.9.1.i  
 S.9.1.j  
 S.9.1.k  
 S.9.1.l  
 S.9.1.m  
 S.9.1.n

TEXT S.10.1 Public, unprepared commentary, demonstration, (sports comment), dialogue face-to-face

TEXT S.11.1 Public, unprepared commentary, demonstration, oration . A trial (legal discourse)

TEXT S.12.1 Public, prepared oration (face-to-face) . Monologue: priest's sermon in church

S.12.1.a  
 S.12.1.b  
 S.12.1.c  
 S.12.1.d

2) THE GOLDEN GIRLS TELEVISION EPISODES and

3) THE "YES, MINISTER" TELEVISION EPISODES: These television

programmes were chosen considering that they seemed to include various examples and different forms of verbal irony. Indeed, numerous examples of the phenomenon under study were found, of which 84 in *The Golden Girls* (hereinafter GG) and 55 in "*Yes Minister*" (hereinafter YM) were randomly selected for the analysis. The speakers and main characters in the GG corpus are generally the "girls", namely, four women of mature age. Three of them, Dorothy, Blanche and Rose, are aged approximately 50 to 60, and Sophia (Dorothy's mother) is about 80 years of age. They all live in the same house, and they have a strong friendship relationship. Other characters ,who vary depending on the episode, may participate in the dialogues.

The speakers and main characters of the YM series are Hacker (the Minister of Administrative affairs), Humphrey (Hacker's secretary), Bernard (another secretary or assistant to

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the Minister) and Hacker's wife. As in GG, other characters may participate depending on the episode.

4) BERTRAND RUSSELL'S WORKS: It was considered necessary to analyse verbal irony not only in its spoken manifestation but also in its written one. Therefore, and taking into account that B. Russell's argumentative prose is very rich in witty, pungent and sometimes humorous language, one of his books containing the most important parts of all his works (*Russell's Best*, 1958) was chosen to look for examples of verbal irony. Again, numerous instances of the phenomenon were identified, of which 46 were randomly selected. This corpus will hereinafter be referred to as BR.

5) THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES: As a complement to B. Russell's works, 80 more instances of written ironic discourse were also included in the repertoire for the analysis. The articles were taken from a newspaper called "The English Press", which re-publishes articles that have been published in different English and/or American newspapers such as "The Spectator", "Time", "The Guardian", etc.. Once more, the examples were numerous, and a random selection had to be made. This corpus will hereinafter be referred to as NA.

As can be seen, the data sources for this investigation are varied and contain a total of 351 instances of ironic discourse, all of which were considered as variables in both the



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quantitative and qualitative analysis made in the different chapters of this thesis, with the exception of chapter 6, where only the LLC corpus was used, for the reasons explained therein.

The data in the corpora were classified according to the different variables studied and analysed in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 of this thesis, and, for that reason, three different data bases were created (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3) so as to facilitate the quantitative analysis.

#### 1.4.2 Analysis and interpretation of the data

Grotjalm (1987) writes about two "pure" research paradigms: 1) the exploratory-interpretive, which "utilises a non-experimental method, yields qualitative data and provides an interpretive analysis of those data" and 2) the analytical-nomological, in which the data are collected through an experiment, and yields quantitative data which are subjected to statistical analysis. In addition to these "pure" paradigms, there are other "mixed" paradigms which mix and match the two pure paradigms in different ways (1987: 59-60). The paradigm of research used in this work is of the mixed type, for I shall work with both qualitative and quantitative data, which will be analysed both in an interpretive and a statistical manner. As was noted above, all the hypotheses (except for Hypothesis n° 10) are tested through a study of the frequencies of occurrence of the variables in question, and the statistical tests of the Median, Kruskal Wallis or Chi square are applied when considered

necessary.

In J.D. Brown's terms (1988), both primary and secondary research are carried out herein. Within the primary research part, the statistical study being made is of the survey type.

The linguistic analysis carried out all throughout this study is of a discourse-pragmatic nature, and, consequently, the variables studied will be interpreted from this perspective. This point is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

I shall now describe the general scheme of this thesis by referring to the contents of each of the chapters.

### 1.5 Chapter outline

Chapter 2 outlines the classical/traditional perspectives on irony and discusses the extent to which these theories should be accepted. Qualitative data from the corpora are presented, as well as a qualitative analysis of examples showing both examples of verbal irony that fit the traditional definitions and examples that do not. The latter are used as qualitative evidence in favour of Hypothesis n° 1. In addition, different typologies of irony are analysed in order to distinguish the type of irony that will be studied all throughout this work, namely, VERBAL IRONY, from other types.

Chapter 3 places verbal irony as a topic to be studied within the framework of pragmatic phenomena. The relationship of verbal irony with Grice's Cooperative Principle, as well as

its relation to conversational and conventional implicatures is discussed. Evidence is presented of instances of verbal irony whose implicatures have been "conventionalised", and, therefore, hypothesis n° 2 is tested. Also, verbal irony is presented in the scope of Speech-act Theory in order to test hypothesis n° 3. Corpus examples of speech act-oriented irony (in opposition to proposition-oriented irony) are analysed.

Chapter 4 presents the most prominent psycholinguistic theories of verbal irony. Sperber & Wilson's Echoic Mention Theory (1981, 1984), Kreuz & Glucksberg's Echoic Reminder Theory (1989), Clark & Gerrig's Pretence Theory (1984), Sigmund Freud's interpretation of jokes and irony, as well as some theories of laughter are discussed. This discussion, together with the analysis of several corpus examples related to it, intends to provide evidence for the acceptance of hypotheses n° 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 studies verbal irony with respect to Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978, 1987). As with the other theories presented in previous chapters, some of the issues put forward by Brown & Levinson are argued, and evidence from the different corpora analysed is presented to test (in a qualitative manner) hypotheses n° 7, 8, 9 and 10. It will appear that 1) verbal irony cannot always be considered as an off record strategy, 2) the three types of irony found in this study have to do with the positive and/or negative face of the addressee or third person in question, 3) verbal irony can violate not only Grice's Quality Maxim but also the Manner, Quantity and Relevance maxims, 4) an ironic speaker may convey his/her meaning through

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different off record strategies, and 5) the sociological variables P, D and R influence the use or non-use of verbal irony in different ways.

In chapter 6, I present a study of intonation and other prosodic features as they occur in ironic discourse. Treatments of irony in the area of intonation and prosody are discussed and evaluated by means of examples from the corpora. A survey is made of the frequencies of occurrence of the different tones (Rise, Fall, Rise-fall, Fall-rise and Level) and other prosodic features in the LLC. The other corpora are not used in this quantitative analysis because prosodic features are not marked in them. The statistical test of the Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) is applied to test hypothesis n° 11 and show whether there is a significant difference between the tones used in non-ironic discourse and those used in ironic discourse. A study of the probabilities of combination of the different prosodic features examined is also made. Finally, I try to discuss in what ways prosodic features may appear in written verbal irony by means of a few corpus examples.

Chapter 7 deals with the types of irony resulting from the discussion of the different approaches studied in previous chapters: 1) From the discussion of traditional approaches, I conclude that there is both a proposition-oriented type of verbal irony and a non-proposition oriented one; 2) from the discussion of Grice's Theory of Implicature, it will appear that there are three main types of irony: a) conversational, b) conventionalised and c) implicature-free; 3) from the discussion of Speech-act

Theory it will be shown that two main types of verbal irony arise: a) speech act-oriented and b) non-speech act-oriented; 4) from the discussion of Sperber & Wilson's Echoic Interpretation Theory, two main types are evident: a) echoic and b) non-echoic; 5) from the discussion of Clark & Gerrig's Pretence Theory, it will appear that there are two main kinds of verbal irony, namely: a) pretence and b) non-pretence; 6) from the discussion of Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory, two main kinds of verbal irony become prominent: a) on record and b) off record. All these types are treated as variables in a quantitative analysis that measures their frequencies of occurrence. This is meant to be the quantitative part of the study intended to test hypotheses n° 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

In chapter 8, I propose a taxonomy of the pragmatic strategies used by ironic speakers/writers which is based on the findings of the analysis of the corpus examples. A definition, or, better, a characterisation of the phenomenon of verbal irony is given in terms of the concept of pragmatic strategy. The key concepts in this characterisation are: **strategy**, **semantic oppositions** and **speaker's attitude**. The strategies for the three main kinds of verbal irony are presented and discussed by means of examples from the five different corpora used in this study. Finally, a study of the frequencies of occurrence of all the strategies is made. Hypotheses 5 and 12 are tested here.

In chapter 9, a classification and analysis of the general and specific discourse functions of verbal irony found in the corpora is made. Verbal irony is viewed in the light of

the main approaches to the study of language functions (such as Jakobson's 1960, Halliday (1976, 1978) or Brown and Yule (1983), but since these approaches prove to be too abstract and general, a more specific and detailed repertoire of functions is described and developed for verbal irony on the basis of the evidence of the samples of ironic discourse in the corpora. A quantitative analysis of the frequencies of occurrence of the different functions identified is made in order to test the final hypothesis of this work, namely, hypothesis n° 13.

Chapter 10 is the concluding chapter, which summarizes the most important findings of the research done in this dissertation and also discusses some of the possibilities for further research on the topic in question.

#### 1.6 Contributions intended by this study

In general terms, this study intends to contribute to a better comprehension of verbal irony as a linguistic/pragmatic phenomenon. This entails the comprehension of its causes, its purposes, the relationship of the interlocutors when engaged in ironic discourse, the types of verbal irony that can be chosen as a strategy, and the functions used by speakers involved in ironic communication.

In particular, I consider the following contributions to be original and not found in the existing literature to date:

- A taxonomy of types of verbal irony (chapter 7);
- An inventory of the pragmatic strategies used by ironic

- speakers (chapter 8);
- An inventory of the discourse functions intended by users of verbal irony (chapter 9); and
  - Both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis of frequencies related to: a) the taxonomies proposed (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9), and b) the prosodic features that accompany verbal irony (chapter 6).

It is my hope, thus, that these contributions help to unravel (at least a bit more than could be done before) the intricate network of psychological, sociological and linguistic mechanisms that a speaker/writer puts into motion when s/he chooses the strategy of verbal irony.

Chapter 2: CLASSICAL FORMULATIONS

OF THE CONCEPT OF IRONY



<<There's true passion only in  
the ambiguous and ironic>>

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor  
Faustus*

## 2.1 Aims of the chapter

One of the aims of this chapter is to survey some definitions of irony and to make a historical account of the evolution of the concept in a general manner. More detailed examination of certain prominent and insightful theories of irony will be made in later chapters.

The main objective within the chapter will be to try to find evidence that shows that many ironic utterances do not simply mean "the opposite of what is said literally" (as classical approaches claim), which will consequently be considered as evidence for the first Research Hypothesis of this study. This does not mean that examples supporting the classical claim were not found. In fact, as had been expected, a great number of examples illustrating the classical-traditional thesis were found in the corpus, in which it can be said that the ironic effect is mainly conveyed by means of the use of "the words which are contrary to the intended meaning". I shall present and analyse these examples, which seem to be simpler and less problematic for interpretation, as well as less "intricate" if we look at them from the standpoint of the speaker producing them. But I shall also show, discuss and analyse the examples that led me to the

them. But I shall also show, discuss and analyse the examples that led me to the conviction that in many cases, when being ironic, a speaker means the opposite and something else, or that s/he may mean something different from the literal words, which has nothing to do with the "opposite"; even more, s/he may, in fact, mean her/his literal words plus something else without diminishing the ironic effect in the least. Furthermore, I will try to answer the question: "what do we mean by 'the opposite'?"; the opposite of the proposition?, of the speech act?, of the presupposition?. Classical-traditional approaches have always been proposition-oriented. Thus, I shall try to show that "meaning the opposite proposition" is not the only possibility for verbal irony and, what seems to be more interesting, that "saying the opposite" is just one more of the possible strategies used to convey ironic meanings.

## 2.2 Some definitions

Irony has been thought of by many authors as a subject that quickly arouses passions. It is both liberating and destroying, clear and obscure, positive and negative. Irony may mean many different things in many different situations and contexts. Hence, it is very difficult to define, perhaps because of its very essence: "its very spirit and value are violated by the effort to be clear about it" (Booth, 1974: ix). The elusiveness of the concept is ironical in itself, as D.C. Enright observes in the introduction to his *Essay on Irony*:

<<Irony... irony... irony. And we haven't yet started. It is unfortunate, it is even ironical, that for so ubiquitous and multifarious and, some say, alluring a phenomenon there should be but one word>> (1988: 7).

Irony has always struck me as one of the cleverest and richest devices of language. Even as a child, I wondered what the strategies or mental connections were that the ironic speaker or writer had to set into motion to get his/her meaning across and how it was that the listener or audience interpreted such a phenomenon. Indeed, on many occasions irony has been referred to as a mode of expression that appeals to the wit and intelligence of the person who uses it and to the listener or reader who recognizes it. For irony is not a privilege of literature or literary language; it is part of everyday interaction and seems to occur very frequently in family talk or everyday language as well as in many other types of discourse.

The meaning of irony can be traced back to Socrates' time (circa 470-399 B.C.). Socrates introduced irony into the world by pretending to be ignorant: By asserting that he was never anyone's teacher, he taught others. This was Socrates' "eironeia": feigned ignorance in order to instruct. In the political sphere, the Athenian statesman and orator Demosthenes (384-322 B.C.) perceived the *eiron* as a civic evader of responsibility through feigned unfitness.

The Roman orator Cicero (106-43 B.C.) marked the movement from a behavioural characteristic to a rhetorical figure that blames by praise or praises by blame. It is important to

remember Cicero's view of the phenomenon, since it will serve us in the later development and classification of the concept. I shall follow his approach in considering that irony can also be used as a praising device, an approach that is not shared by some modern researchers on the subject.

The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (circa 35-100 A.D.) appears to have expanded the circumscribed figure to the manner of whole arguments. He writes of irony as an "ornament" of sentences. He considers it a "trope" as well as a "figure" of speech. As a trope, he defines irony as "the trope in which contrary things are shown" [my translation] (*Instituciones Oratorias*, 1942: 84). As a figure, he indicates that some people give irony the name of "pretence", though he later states that both kinds of irony do not differ very much from each other since both should be understood as "the contrary of what the words sound" [my translation] (1942: 99-100).

These classical definitions were to be the basis of later definitions such as the one given by Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755): "A mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words".

A wider and more modern formulation is the following, in which the word "different" is added, leaving the door open to other interpretations of irony:

<<Expression of one's meaning by language of opposite or different tendency, especially simulated adoption of another's point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule; ill-timed or perverse arrival of

event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if mockery of the fitness of things; use of language that has an inner meaning for a privileged audience and an outer meaning for the persons addressed or concerned. /f.L.f. Gk eironeia, simulated ignorance. eiron dissembler/>>. (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, quoted by Enright, 1988:5)

The traditional and classical concept of irony has remained valid in this century for some scholars. The 1994 edition of *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines irony as:

<<The humorous and sardonic use of words to express the opposite of what one really means (as when words of praise are given but blame is intended)>>.

When saying "the opposite of what the words mean" I understand that the classical approaches refer to the opposite meaning of the proposition of the utterance; then, within this framework, an utterance would only be ironic when its proposition is false or insincere. To put it in other words, and using Bruce Fraser's (1994) terminology, an ironic utterance would always express an act of *misrepresentation*. The essence of misrepresentation lies in conveying false information. There are many kinds of misrepresentation: lying, for example, is an act of misrepresentation. But, what is the difference between lying and being ironic? Are we lying when we are ironic and say something different from the truth? Fraser distinguishes between two main types of misrepresentation: intentional and unintentional. Both lying and being ironic are intentional acts of misrepresentation, but intentional acts of misrepresentation may have the intent to mislead or not to mislead the hearer, and

here is where the difference between lying and being ironic is found. Fraser himself writes about "speaking sarcastically" as an intentional act of misrepresentation with the intent not to mislead, that is, the ironic or sarcastic speaker wants the hearer to understand and know his (the speaker's) hidden meaning, whereas the liar's intention is to mislead the hearer and deceive him. As can be observed, Fraser is also working here with conditions of truth or falsehood, though his interpretation of them is a more flexible one than the logical interpretation, for he states that "the notion of false information is a matter of individual speaker/hearer belief at any given time" (1994: 144).

Fraser's classification of acts of misrepresentation is useful and clarifying in many respects, and the location of irony within this framework that I have just made is - I believe - only appropriate for the majority of irony cases, but not for all of them, for, as I shall try to show in the development of this chapter, there are instances of irony in which the speaker cannot be accused of misrepresenting the truth, not even the truthfulness of his belief at the particular time of his utterance. David Holdcroft (1983) gives proof of this when reflecting on Socrates' irony. Holdcroft states that in saying that his wisdom consisted in the recognition that he knew nothing, Socrates was not being ironical in the sense of "saying the opposite of what he meant"; on the contrary, he meant what he said (1983: 509).

In her paper "On saying what you mean without meaning

what you say", Ann Cuttler also holds the thesis that when a speaker is ironic he is being false or insincere. She adds that "there are certain types of statement which cannot turn out to be false" and that "it is not surprising, therefore, that they also cannot accept irony" (1974:120). This is clearly a formulation looked at through the prism of truth-conditional semantics, but we now know that semantics is something more than conditions of truth or falsehood and that language is not reduced to a set of true and false propositions. It has been observed in the research that, in many cases, ironic meaning is conveyed through a contradiction of speech acts (as we shall see in chapter 3) or through several other strategies. Anne Cuttler also states that a simple question "cannot accept an ironic reading" (1974: 121), a statement that, as we shall see in example 4 of section 2.4 in this chapter (and later on in many other examples in the corpora analysed), can not be supported by my and other authors' -like Haverkate (1988) for instance- approaches to irony.

The classical idea of irony can also be inferred in Brown and Levinson's treatment of the subject in their *Theory of Politeness* (1978). This theory will be analysed in detail in chapter 5, since it has thrown great light on pragmatic issues, and I consider it very fertile soil for the exposition and clarification of ironic phenomena, in spite of the fact that in the approach taken in this work some of its proposals can and will be argued.

Even though -as has been shown- there have been and there still are many authors who look at irony exclusively from the "opposite-proposition", traditional point of view, it is now becoming obvious for many researchers that the phenomenon is not that simple. Even in the cases in which the speaker or writer means "the opposite" there are further pragmatic shades of meaning that can be analysed. Irony expresses elusive thoughts and fine shades of feeling with particular effectiveness. In many cases we can only speak of "mild irony" or different degrees of irony, as will be shown all through the development of this study, which will help us look at irony from a less strict and less rigid point of view, showing us that it is very difficult to define a concept in terms of absolute categories like truth or falsehood. Roy (1978) notes in a study of irony in conversation that irony versus non-irony is not a binary distinction but rather a continuum. Devorah Tannen (1984) makes a thorough analysis of the irony used by herself and some friends in a conversation on the occasion of a Thanksgiving dinner, and she notes that even when she knows that arriving at a satisfying definition of irony is a difficult task, she regarded statements as humorous or ironic *"if they seemed not to be meant literally and seemed to be intended to amuse"* (1984:130). This criterion to classify utterances as ironic perhaps reflects the modern conception of irony supported by a considerable number of speakers of English. It shows a wider and more open standpoint for the consideration of the phenomenon. Tannen also remarks



that there is always some subjectivity involved in classifying utterances as ironic or not ironic, a subjectivity that I myself have also found difficult to avoid all throughout the development of this study. In any case, complete objectivity seems to be a chimera in any piece of research if we consider that everything that we study is seen through our limited human eyes and minds. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) show how both objectivism and subjectivism become myths if taken to an extremist position.

Another author reflecting this wider viewpoint of the concept of irony is Walter Nash (1985), who views irony as an indisputably major stylistic resort within humour, and remarks that literary critics are, nowadays, in the habit of using the word to denote "any oblique reflection, any inconsistency of character, any unforeseen turn in the fable, any sign of a perverse current of meaning not directed by the author". This is a real and valid view of irony, though Nash states that he considers it a rather loose one. For that reason, he later tries to delimit the concept a bit more and adds that the consensus appears to be (among different authors and dictionaries) that:

<<The ironist insincerely states something he does not mean, but through the manner of his statement -whether through its formulation, or its delivery, or both- is able to encode a counter-proposition, his "real meaning", which may be interpreted by the attentive listener or reader>> (1985: 152)

It can be observed here that, on the one hand, Nash is conscious

of the existence of a line of thought that studies irony from a wider perspective, but, on the other hand, he restricts the meaning of irony for fear it may become a loose or unmanageable concept, and so he falls into the old conception of the "counter-proposition", which, as I have noted and shall try to show hereinafter, is valid only for some cases of irony.

As can be seen, no author is completely clear about the definition of irony and no one has been able to provide the researchers of the phenomenon with concise accounts of its workings. The intention of this study is, thus, to clarify the concept in the light of linguistic-pragmatics, with the belief that this approach is more comprehensive than the classical one.

It would perhaps be desirable to arrive at a more complete and all-embracing definition of irony than the ones we have been analysing, although the more I study the phenomenon, the more I believe that this is a very difficult, if not impossible task, at least with respect to the "all-embracing" part of my statement. In a way, Marino is right when he says (about irony) in the *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*:

<<It does little good to make a neat formal definition that neither the language nor even individual scholars can observe. The chimera can be neither slain nor tamed>> (1994: 1776).

Before presenting the examples taken from the corpus which illustrate classical theories and the ones that are intended to give evidence for my first hypothesis, it will be necessary to

present the different types of irony that have been considered and generated by different authors, so that I am able to state which of the categories will be the object of this study.

### 2.3 Typologies of irony

Different authors have classified irony in different ways. Not all classifications will be considered, since the ones presented here appear to be sufficient for the purposes of this investigation. I shall proceed to explain, then, what the authors mean by "irony of fate", "dramatic irony", "extant irony", "artefacted irony", "verbal irony" and "situational irony".

#### 2.3.1 Irony of fate, dramatic irony and verbal irony

David King and Thomas Crerar (1969) write about three different kinds of irony: a) irony of circumstance or fate, b) dramatic irony, and c) verbal irony. I shall try to explain what each one is supposed to be:

a) the irony of fate is the irony which lies in the predicament that the pattern of the narrative creates. Many authors have made use of this kind of irony, e.g.: Conrad in *Youth*, Steinbeck in *The Pearl*, Tolstoy in *How much Land does a Man Need?*, etc. King & Crerar illustrate this type of irony with the old story of the servant who, "one morning, went down into the market place

of his town and there encountered the figure of Death. Death stared at him with a strange expression. Terrified, the servant ran to his master to beg permission to flee that afternoon to Samarrah. The master consented. Later, he descended himself into the market place, saw the figure of Death, and accosted him. "Why did you look so fiercely at my servant?", he demanded. "Not fiercely", replied Death. "I was startled to see him in his place. I have an appointment with him this afternoon in Samarrah". (1969: 124).

This story is ironic in that the very thing the servant did to save his life was what led him to his death. The audience first hears with relief that the servant will flee to Samarrah but then learns what his real fate will be.

b) Dramatic irony is the kind of irony created in a work of fiction -especially in a drama. There is here an action of speech whose significance is missed by one or more of the characters presented. King & Crerar give the example of Oedipus, who curses the man who has polluted Thebes, the city state he governs as a king; it is he who has polluted the city -then he brings down the curse upon his own head.

In my opinion, the difference between irony of fate and dramatic irony is very subtle, and many times they can be the same or co-occur. In fact, there are authors who do not make such a distinction. Now, there is, indeed, considerable difference between these two kinds and the third category, i.e., verbal irony, which I shall now treat.

c) Verbal irony is the type of irony I am concerned with in this study. Verbal irony does not depend upon a special pattern in events, upon coincidence or upon circumstances in the same way as the other two types. Naturally, its interpretation is related to a certain context and circumstances, but the irony here is generated by utterances and by the varying degrees of understatement with which the words are used. The following definition of verbal irony is King & Crerar's, and adds to our consideration of different approaches to the concept:

<<It is the irony created by words used in such a way that their surface meaning is different from the underlying, intended meaning. It will be generated most often either by exaggeration or by understatement, both of which in their own way draw the reader's attention to the author's real purpose. Since verbal irony tends to ridicule rather than praise, it is a useful device in the hands of a satirist, whose function is to display abuses, mock them, and, ideally, inspire us to correct them. It will permit a writer to express himself with subtlety, wit, intelligence, and restraint and thus challenge the able and perceptive reader>> (1969: 125).

Some observations should be made about the previous definition:

- King and Crerar speak of writer and reader only; thus, it is necessary that speaker and listener be added. In this study both spoken and written language will be considered. The corpus I am using for this piece of research consists of television programmes, a corpus of English conversation, some newspaper articles and a book containing a collection of excerpts from Bertrand Russell's works (as specified in 1.4).

- Nothing is said about the Cooperative Principle, implicatures, speech acts, pragmatic strategies or discourse functions, because it is a rather old definition (albeit far more embracing than the traditional ones). These aspects will be dealt with in due course in this study.
- The authors say that irony tends to ridicule rather than praise, which does not mean that it can never be used to praise. Indeed, they themselves present perfect examples of irony conveying praise. This point will be treated in special detail in chapters 4 and 5.

Prototypical examples of verbal irony would be:

1. You're a fine friend.
2. How clever of you!

when, in 1, the addressee has done something that does not precisely make him a good friend, and when, in 2, the addressee has done or said something that was not considered clever or appropriate by the speaker. But verbal irony can go much further than this, as will be shown throughout the chapters of this thesis.

### 2.3.2 Extant and Artefacted irony

M. Marino, in the aforementioned *Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics*, presents four categories of irony which have been pragmatically generated -verbal, dramatic, extant and artefacted irony- and adds the following interesting comment:

"Any claim to mutual exclusivity or comprehensiveness for these categories would be ironically naive" (1994: 1776).

As regards verbal irony, Marino names and analyses the classical definitions, arriving at the conclusion that "the usual invocation of an opposite meaning seems far too strong since so many verbal ironies are only subtly different from their literal messages" (1994: 1777).

As can be observed, this classification coincides with the previous one in verbal and dramatic irony, but there are two other types that are not named by King and Cramer or at least are not called by such names, i.e., extant and artefacted irony. From the explanations given, it can be inferred that extant irony is approximately the same as irony of fate, only with a more "philosophical touch". It is a kind of cosmic irony that suggests the indifference of the universe to the efforts of man and can be expressed in a view that God, a god, or the universe manipulates outcomes in some way not known to human beings, which is not considerate of their aspirations (1994: 1777). Artefacted irony is the kind of irony that is particularly artefacted for effects beyond its irony. Marino states that Socratic irony falls into this category, since Socrates clearly artefacted special circumstances in such a way that "the naivete of the pose created allowed him subtly to expose the error of his victim and effectively to understate his own view of truth" (1994: 1777).

Again, it is very difficult to see in what way this last type of irony is distinct from at least two of the other types,

since, if I am not mistaken, both verbal and dramatic irony can be said to be artefacted to obtain effects beyond their irony: the former by the speaker/writer, and the latter by the creator or writer of the play or work.

### 2.3.3 Verbal versus situational irony

Finally, I shall turn my attention to a more general and simple typology: the one offered by D.C. Muecke (1969). Muecke draws a distinction between two basic kinds of irony: verbal and situational. The difference between them is mainly a matter of intention, i.e., in verbal irony the ironist's intention to be ironical is a necessary -albeit not sufficient- condition, whereas the irony of an ironical situation or event is unintentional: "the confident unawareness of the victim of the irony is a necessary but again not sufficient condition for the existence of irony in that situation or event" (Muecke, 1973:35). Muecke explains that situational irony includes dramatic irony, cosmic irony and irony of fate, and that this is basically an irony to be observed (and not to be uttered).

Katharina Barbe (1993) and other authors (Tanaka 1973, Litman and May 1991, etc.) follow Muecke in his approach. Barbe, from a more modern and colloquial perspective, states that verbal irony is implicit in that we never specify: "I am ironic in saying this..." or "I am now going to make an ironic utterance". Situational irony is, on the contrary, explicit, because when we



speak of any ironic situation, we generally say (or write) things like: "It is ironic to me that...", "Isn't it ironic that...?". Thus Barbe acknowledges the presence of explicit irony markers in the case of situational irony.

It is one of the objectives of this investigation to find out whether we can also speak of irony markers for verbal irony. This seems to be a difficult task, considering its implicit nature, but all hope is not lost, since it has been noticed that there might exist a certain degree of conventionalisation in certain ironic expressions, as will be discussed in chapter 3.

Muecke's categorisation is considered good enough for the purposes of this research and, consequently, I shall hereinafter refer either to verbal or situational irony, disregarding other typologies. As has already been stated, verbal irony is the object of this study, though situational irony will be useful in cases in which the need to contrast one type with the other might turn up.

## 2.4 Analysis of various examples from the corpus in relation to traditional approaches

### 2.4.1. Prototypical examples

Despite the fact that examples such as those presented in 2.3.1 ("You're a fine friend" or "What a clever idea") are considered to be the prototypical ones for verbal irony, it has not been easy to find such examples in the corpus. As has already been explained, there always seem to appear other shades

of pragmatical meaning that go beyond "the opposite of the literal meaning or proposition". In any case, the following instances of verbal irony are the closest I have found to the classical idea of irony, i.e., they are instances in which it can be said that the speaker means "the opposite". The test I will use in order to check whether or not they fit into the traditional definitions of irony will be precisely to express the proposition contrary to what the literal proposition expresses and see if that is the meaning the speaker wanted to convey.

[1] The following conversational exchange has been taken from the GG corpus. As was explained in Chapter 1, the golden "girls" are four mature women who live together in Florida. Dorothy and Sophia are always very sarcastic, and Rose is considered to be rather naive and not very intelligent. In this episode Rose is worried about Blanche's having gone to the hospital to donate one of her kidneys to her sister:

Rose: I'm worried about Blanche. I wish she'd let one of us go with her.

Sophia: Not me. I hate hospitals. My friend Manny Fishbein went into the hospital a healthy guy. Then, boom-boom, dead. Just like that. In his sleep. Ninety-eight years old. No apparent cause.

Rose: I don't like hospitals either. They're full of germs. I always hold my breath in the elevators because there are sick people in the elevators and it's such a small space and once I had to go to the eighth floor of a hospital and the elevator stopped on every floor and I had to hold my breath all that time and I finally fainted and I hit my head and then I had to stay there because I had a concussion and I had to hold my breath all the way down

in the elevator to the emergency room then I had to hold my breath in X-ray where they ask you to hold your breath anyway and...  
(Dorothy enters)

Dorothy: I have great news.

Sophia: Rose, you'll excuse me. We'll get back to your fascinating hospital story later.  
(GG, 1991: 54-5)

Sophia's last statement is clearly ironic after Rose's boring story explaining why she does not like hospitals. I believe it can be said here that Sophia means the opposite of the literal meaning of her utterance, i.e., Rose's hospital story is not fascinating, and it does not seem possible that they will get back to the story later (as opposed to the literal meaning of the proposition). The test for proving whether Sophia's utterance is ironical in the traditional sense or not has been passed: Sophia means that she does not want to get back to the story and that the story is not fascinating. But more pragmatic meaning can be understood between the lines. It could also be added that Sophia thinks that Rose's story is boring and even stupid, and that she prefers to listen to Dorothy's news. Sophia's last utterance can also be taken as an indirect speech act meaning something like: "stop telling your silly story; I'm fed up with it, and I would like to change the topic of conversation". This would be a command having the form of an assertion (this aspect will be analysed in detail in 3.4).

The reader might have noticed another instance of irony in the conversation reproduced for this example, namely, Sophia's

first comment about her friend Manny Fishbein, who "died in hospital when he was ninety-eight years old of *no apparent cause*". But the irony in this case cannot be considered as an example of verbal irony, for Sophia is saying it convincingly, being apparently innocent of the irony present in stating that a ninety-eight year-old person has died of no apparent cause (considering that she herself is quite old too), thus I think this is a clear case of "situational irony" and not of verbal irony.

[2] In the following chunk of dialogue taken from the LLC, more than one instance of verbal irony can be found. In fact, the whole chunk has an ironic tone, but it is only in one of A's utterances where it can be said that the speaker means "the opposite":

```

A 11 ^have you ever 'heard Pro'fessor Mc"C\all /
A 11 l/ecture# - /
A 11 ^he's ((round)) at "!T\OPAS I th/ink# /
B 11 *((^n/o#))* /
A 11 *I* ^only 'ever :went :/\once# . /
A 11 it was e^n/ough# - /
B 11 ^[\m]# - - /
A 11 ^oh d/\ear# /
A 11 ^Br\idget will 'tell you th/at# /
A 11 ^she was at the :same !l\ecture# /
B 11 ^[\m]# - - /
B 11 ^what's _he !l\ike# /
A 11 ^oh he was t/\errible# /
B 20 ( - giggles) /
A 11 ^t\errible# - /
A 11 ^so abstr/use# - /
A 11 he ^does !s\ound 'changes# /
A 11 and ^all th\at sort of 'thing# /
A 11 ^you !kn/ow# /
B 20 ( - - - laughs) /
A 11 ^so abstr/use# /
A 13 ^he ^[?]he you ^can't 'read his 'writing on the /

```

A 13 bl/ackboard# /  
 A 11 he ^uses a bl\ack'board# . //  
 A 11 ((and)) ^writes il'legible th/ings on it# //  
 A 11 \*^you\* kn/ow# - //  
 B 11 \*^[\m]#\* //  
 A 11 ^which is ((a)) gr\eat help# - //  
 A 11 and ^then he says !course ((if)) you !don't //  
 A 11 underst\and this# - //  
 A 11 this ^subject's !not for y/ou# . //  
 A 11 ( . laughs)

(LLC, 1980: S.1.6)

When A says that Professor McCall's writing on the blackboard was "a great help", it is evident that she means that it was not a help at all, considering all that was previously said about the professor. If the professor wrote "illegible things" on the blackboard, these things could not have been a great help. Then the test for traditional irony is passed: the speaker means the opposite proposition, i.e., "the writing on the blackboard was not a help". But, at the same time, there are other comments such as "I only went once. It was enough", which show ironic criticism on the part of the speaker, though not by meaning the opposite. The whole dialogue leaves the hearer or reader with the impression that Professor McCall's lectures are very boring and do not teach the audience much. At the same time, a derogatory attitude can be deduced on the part of the speakers towards the subject taught by the professor, which seems to be of no interest to them. Again, the meaning of ironic utterances proves to follow the classical guidelines to a certain point, but it also proves to go further than that. Examples of this sort (going further than meaning "the opposite proposition")

will be analysed and tested in the following section (2.4.2).

[3] I shall now turn to the British television series "Yes, Minister". In the first episode (called "Open Government") James Hacker, fresh from his triumph at the general election, is very nervous because he is expecting a telephone call from the Prime Minister, who should confirm his status as a Cabinet Minister. His wife is very nervous too, and does not seem to feel very happy about being a politician's wife:

Hacker's wife: It sounds as if you're about to enter the  
Ministry

Hacker: Yes, but which Ministry. That's the whole point.

Hacker's wife: It was a joke!

Hacker: You're very tense

Hacker's wife: Oh, no! I'm not tense. I'm just a politician's  
wife. A happy, carefree politician's wife.

(YM, 1994 video episode)

Hacker's wife is one of the characters in the series that uses verbal irony most. She shows great scepticism about her husband's new functions as a Cabinet Minister and does not like the consequences this new situation brings to their family life (they have no free time, her husband works long hours, etc.). In her last utterance in the dialogue, it can be appreciated that she is being ironic in the traditional way, since what she precisely means is that she is neither happy nor carefree. She

also implies that being a politician's wife is not an easy or simple thing ("I'm just a politician's wife"). The use of the word "just" here is very revealing. Again, and after finding an example in which the test for prototypical irony is passed, we find other elements in the linguistic context of that example that help the ironic meaning, but that do not mean the opposite of the proposition expressed. Hacker's wife cannot mean "I'm not just a politician wife", for she is, in fact, the wife of a Minister. The ironic meaning here is better interpreted here through the contrast found between the word "just", which literally means "simply", and the difficult role of a politician's wife. She ultimately means, then, that she is finding it very difficult to play such a role.

[4] It has been very difficult to find a prototypical example of irony within Bertrand Russell's heavily ironic argumentative prose. The irony is always present in his writings, but in a more refined, intricate and complex way. One instance which could be considered to be one of his nearest approaches to traditional irony can be found in the following passage:

<<When Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning-rod, the clergy, both in England and America, with enthusiastic support of George III, condemned it as an impious attempt to defeat the will of God. For, as all right-thinking people were aware, lightning is sent by God to punish impiety or some other grave sin -the virtuous are never struck by lightning. Therefore if God wants to strike anyone, Benjamin Franklin ought not to defeat His design; indeed, to do so is helping criminals to escape.>>

(BR, 1958: 135)

When Russell writes "right-thinking people" he, in fact, obviously means that these people were not right-thinking at all; thus it can be said that, in this case, he is following the traditional rules to express verbal irony: he means the opposite. Likewise, when he writes "to do so is helping criminals to escape" , he really wants to show his readers that he is ridiculing the people (the clergy) who held this belief, and that what he thinks is precisely the opposite: "to do so has nothing to do with helping criminals to escape". But if I am to be rigorous in the analysis, the meaning conveyed here is not exactly the opposite of the proposition; the exact opposite would be "To do so is not to help criminals to escape", which is not the intended meaning. The intended meaning has to do with a serious criticism of the clergy, in which Russell attacks what he believes to be their prejudices and ignorance, and so he adopts this scornful, mock-ironic tone. Likewise, when he ironically writes "the virtuous are never struck by lightning", he does not mean the opposite of the proposition, i.e. "The virtuous are always struck by lightning" as can clearly be appreciated. What he really means is that the people who hold this belief are foolish or ignorant. Here we are facing an instance of "echoic verbal irony", by means of which the writer echoes other people's ideas and laughs at them or criticises them in some way. Echoic verbal irony is discussed in 4.2, 4.3 and 4.6. (see also chapters 7 and 8).

Once more, we have been able to observe the ironic



speaker/writer making use of his weapon according to traditional norms in some way, but escaping its boundaries in search of a better and richer way of expressing his thoughts.

#### 2.4.2. Counterexamples: Testing Research Hypothesis n° 1

Although the classical definitions capture some aspects of the phenomenon of irony, they only describe it in a partial way, as I believe can be deduced from all that has been said hitherto. It is a leap from this conventional idea of irony to the richness that can be found in it. Some authors now support this view; one of these is Diane Blakemore (1992), who presents many ironic utterances which simply cannot be analysed in terms of "meaning the opposite; e.g.: the quotation "Oh, to be in England, now that April's there", produced on a cold, wet day during an English spring; shows that the speaker is making fun of romantic ideas about spring. Blakemore follows Sperber & Wilson in her approach (Sperber & Wilson's view of irony will be discussed and analysed in detail in chapter 4). Other authors, Booth (1974) and Harvey (1983) among them, have also presented insightful illustrations of the fact that irony -albeit not a very complicated concept to be apprehended- has at least a problematical nature which sets it apart from the clear and simple classical definitions. This is the basic idea of the first Research Hypothesis of this study. In chapter 3 we shall see how the contradiction implied in all cases of verbal irony may be present at the illocutionary level

of the speech act and not at that of the proposition. There are also other levels at which verbal irony can be manifested, for instance, the level of presupposition, as has been shown by Bollobás (1981).

I shall now proceed to analyse some ironic examples from the corpus in which it can not be said by any means that the speaker/writer is conveying the opposite meaning of the proposition. I believe that these examples display great evidence in favour of Research Hypothesis n° 1.

[1]

<<A large proportion of the human race, it is true, is obliged to work so hard in obtaining necessities that little energy is left over for other purposes; but those whose livelihood is assured do not on that account, cease to be active.... Mrs A, who is quite sure of her husband's success in business, and has no fear of the workhouse, likes to be better dressed than Mrs B, although she could escape the danger of pneumonia at much less expense>>

(BR, 1958: 31)

This passage is a part of one of Russell's social analyses, in which he criticises one sector of this society (the rich: "those whose livelihood is assured"), and, to that purpose, he depicts the ambitions of the rich in an ironical way, which, I believe, would be very difficult to catalogue as "meaning the opposite". When he ironically writes "Mrs A likes to be better dressed than Mrs B, although she could escape the danger of pneumonia at much less expense", he does not mean that Mrs A does not like to be better dressed than Mrs B or that she could not escape the danger of pneumonia at much less expense; in fact, he

means every word he says, since it is true that "Mrs A" could be well dressed and not catch a cold wearing cheaper clothes. But we infer there is a further meaning because of his choice of words and way of expressing himself: it is, for example, the formal language used in "she could escape the danger of pneumonia at much less expense" that makes us think there is a mocking and pungently criticising intention. The test for traditionally conveyed irony has not been passed by this piece of ironic discourse.

[2] In the following dialogue, taken from GG, we will be able to appreciate, once more, the bitterness and sarcastic irony which is very frequently present in Sophia's words. In this episode the girls are taking care of some neighbours' baby:

Blanche: What's the baby doing here?

Dorothy: It's Lucy and Ted's baby. Ted had a little accident waterskiing, Lucy's taking him to the hospital.

-----  
Rose: (to baby) Utchy butchy butchy butchy boo. Utchy butchy butchy boo. Butchy boo. Butchy boo.

Sophia: Finally someone she can talk to.

(GG, 1991: 39)

Sophia's final comment is ironic, though it does not pass the test for traditional irony. It is not the case that Sophia means: "Finally someone she cannot talk to" or "Finally there is not someone she can talk to"; her utterance is an ironical and indirect way of saying that Rose is stupid and can never engage

in clever conversation, but, as has been shown, this meaning seems to be quite distant from what one would consider "the opposite" of the utterance or of the proposition. The irony here lies in the contrast between what would be considered a piece of clever talk or conversation and the "butchy boo" type of conversational exchange between Rose and the baby, which, according to Sophia, is the only or at least the cleverest type of conversation Rose can manage to hold. The use of the adverb *finally* is the clue to an ironic interpretation here, for it implies that she had never before met anyone having an intellectual level low enough to communicate with. This shows, once more, what a powerful weapon irony can be in the hands of a resourceful speaker/writer.

[3] The conversation presented in this example has been taken from the LLC. In it, two academics (a man and a woman) are talking about the Head of the Department. They are obviously criticising him, but, in order not to use a stronger word, A speaks "elegantly" and ironically of him as being "idiosyncratic":

```

A 11 *^{m\y} !g\osh# /
A 11 ^we're a !sm\all de'partment# /
A 11 ^we've !only 'three l\ecturers## . /
A 11 ^w\ell# /
A 11 **^one's** a :pr\incipal l/ecturer# /
A 11 the ^head of dep/artment# /
A 11 and ^then there are ((only)) !tw\o of us /
A 11 l/ecturers# *-* /
A 11 - and we're ^(g\etting) an!\other one# /
A 11 ^\actually# /
A 11 so I ^shan't be the :junior !girl any !l\onger# /
B 11 *^[m]## /

```

B 11 ^[\m]# /  
A 11 . " ^but [?] the !head of de:p\artment# /  
A 11 is a ^l\ittle 'bit# /  
A 11 ^idio'syn!cr\atic# . /  
A 11 an " ^(\awfully) :n\ice 'chap# /  
A 11 I ^get on 'very :w\ell with him# /  
A 11 I'm ^not . !m\eaning that# /  
A 11 ^there's !\any [@m]# - /  
A 11 [di] . dis" ^h\armony# . /  
A 11 we ^get on !f\ine# /  
A 11 ^b\ut# . /  
A 11 in ^his i!deas of :teaching :\English# /  
A 11 [[:] - a ^little 'idiosyn:cr\atic# - /

(LLC, 1980: S.1.6)

This is followed by a criticism of some comment about Literature made by the Head of the Department. When ironically qualifying him as idiosyncratic, A does not mean that "he is not idiosyncratic"; once more the test for traditional or prototypical irony is not passed: The hearer should better infer that A does not agree at all with the Head of Department's ideas about teaching English or perhaps something stronger: that the Head of Department has crazy ideas about teaching English. The hedges "a little bit" and "a little" help the ironic interpretation. In fact, it has been observed in all the instances of irony analysed in the corpus that "hedging" is a much more common strategy used by ironists than "using the opposite proposition" (and so it will be shown all throughout this work). This is a clear case of ironic discourse violating the Gricean Maxim of Quantity, and not that of Quality (see 5.2.2).

support research hypothesis n° 1. As was explained in 2.4.1 (example 3), in the first episode, James Hacker is very nervous because he is expecting a telephone call from the Prime Minister, who should confirm his status as a Cabinet Minister. His political adviser, Frank Weisel, calls at his house to tell him the news about the new Cabinet Ministers who have already been appointed:

Weisel: Did you know Martin's got the Foreign Office?  
Jack's got Health and Fred's got Energy.

Hacker's wife: Has anyone got brains?

(YM, 1994 video episode: *Open Government*)

The question asked by the wife has a heavily ironic tone; all through the episode, she shows discontent about now being a Minister's wife, and she then tries to mock all the seriousness the situation may have. Again, this question is not contrary to the meaning conveyed by it. Once more, the test is not passed. In fact, here the ironic comment is realised by means of a question, which cannot be said to be true or false. That is why many authors who support the traditional approach to irony, such as Ann Cuttler (1974), assert that simple questions cannot accept an ironic reading. It is clear, however, that Hacker's wife is being sarcastic and ironic when asking scornfully if "anyone has got brains". This is one more of the strategies used to convey irony, namely, the use of rhetorical questions (a strategy that will be illustrated at many points of my discussion, but more specifically in chapters 5 and 8). Obviously, if we stuck to

specifically in chapters 5 and 8). Obviously, if we stuck to strict traditional approaches, we would miss a great deal of the pragmatic meaning conveyed here: Hacker's wife is being bitter again and is trying to say that she doubts any Minister has intelligence.

Many more examples could be presented in favour of research hypothesis n° 1, but I believe the pieces of discourse analysed in this chapter provide enough evidence to make us reflect upon the complex nature of the phenomenon of verbal irony. There is now considerable evidence supporting the first hypothesis of this piece of research. As a final and concluding example I would like to quote Enright (1988) in what he presents as the best known of Pascal's ironies. It comes towards the end of Pascal's Letter XVI, when he explains apologetically that "the letter is longer than usual only because he didn't have the time to make it shorter" (1988: 11). I find it very difficult to express the "opposite" of this proposition, which, in any case, would not express the interesting pragmatic meaning that this utterance seems to carry along with it.

## 2.5 Summary and conclusions of the chapter

In this chapter we have been able to look at irony in the light of traditional approaches, which seems to be very useful

for a consideration of how the phenomenon was originally understood by scholars and for later reference when considering the evolution of the concept.

After presenting some of the existing typologies of irony, it has been stated that the object of our study is *verbal irony*, as opposed to *situational irony*.

Examples from the corpus have been presented and analysed, some of which seem to be in agreement with the traditional explanations of irony, although other shades of pragmatic-ironic meaning always seem to be present in them. Some others are clearly counterexamples which show that, in a great number of cases, a speaker or writer can convey irony through strategies other than "stating the opposite". This has provided me with linguistic evidence for the acceptance of Research Hypothesis n° 1, which states that ironical meanings go beyond "the opposite of the literal meaning" of the proposition of the utterance. (A quantitative analysis in relation to this hypothesis is made in chapter 7).

After the analysis of the aforementioned examples, I believe that the most that can be said in favour of "meaning the opposite of the literal words" is that this is only one more of the various strategies that a speaker or writer has at his/her disposal for conveying irony. I shall, therefore, try to broaden the scope, starting, in the following chapter, with the location of irony within the world of pragmatics.



Chapter 3: IRONY AS AN ELEMENT WITHIN  
PRAGMATIC PHENOMENA

<<It may be harder to demonstrate objectively that a certain utterance is ironic or flip than, say, that the operation of verb phrase deletion is subject to considerations of syntactic identity. But we are no less certain of the first claim than the second. In the end, there is more than one kind of "knowledge for sure".>>

G. Numberg, *Validating Pragmatic Explanations*

### 3.1 Irony and Pragmatics

To define Pragmatics and delimit its scope is almost as difficult as to define irony, as Levinson very well shows his readers in the first chapter of *Pragmatics* (1983).

Levinson presents a series of different definitions of Pragmatics and though none of them seem to cover completely the aspects that are part of this discipline, one thing we conclude for sure: irony is an important issue to study within the field of Pragmatics. Elements such as context, meaning beyond literal meaning, speech acts, understatement, implicature, etc., are considered important components of this discipline. If we think of Semantics as the area of study covering the truth-conditional meaning of utterances, then Pragmatics would deal with all other kinds of meaning. In any case, comprehension is demonstrably a mixture of pragmatic and semantic matters, and, as Morgan observes, introspection supplies us with no simple clue to what is semantic and what is pragmatic in a given case (1978: 266).

The reason for this is perhaps that Pragmatics is one more area within the field of Semantics, or, as George Lakoff remarked (in a talk given at the Complutense University in Madrid, 1994):

"Pragmatics is also Semantics".

When dealing with irony, Levinson states that a pragmatic theory must have available "the detailed recipe for usage" which tells us that a given ironic utterance is not the normal usage, and thus not to be taken at face value. He also points to the fact that "pragmatic accounts of language understanding will at least need access to sociolinguistic information" (1983: 28), and I would like to add that they will need access to psycholinguistic and psychologic information as well. Irony is very much connected to psychological mechanisms, as the theories we shall study in chapter 4 emphasize.

Leech's inclusion of "The Irony Principle" as one of his "Principles of Pragmatics" is well-known. Leech notes that both Semantics and Pragmatics are concerned with meaning, but, whereas Semantics traditionally deals with meaning as a dyadic relation, Pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation; thus, "meaning in Pragmatics is defined relative to the speaker or user of the language, whereas meaning in Semantics is defined purely as a property of expressions in a given language, in abstraction from particular situations, speakers or hearers" (1983: 6). Therefore, we shall be working within the field of Pragmatics if we make reference to the following aspects of the speech situation: i) addressers or addressees, ii) the context of an utterance, iii) the goals of an utterance, iv) the utterance as

a form of act or activity: a speech act, and v) the utterance as a product of a verbal act (1983: 13-14). These are, according to Leech, the elements of the speech situation that should be taken into account for any serious pragmatic study, but there are other variables that I believe should be included, such as the culture in which the utterance has been produced, its time and place and other sociological variables such as power or distance (as we shall see in chapter 5).

### 3.1.1 The scope of this study: Discourse analysis and Pragmatics

In this piece of research I am analysing ironic discourse. Therefore, it can also be said that this study is within the scope of Discourse Analysis, as conceived by Brown & Yule (1983), Levinson (1983) or McCarthy and Carter (1994). As Brown & Yule note, "the discourse analyst necessarily takes a pragmatic approach to the study of language in use" (1983:27). The discourse analyst investigates the use of language in context by a speaker or writer. S/he is, thus, interested in what speakers/writers do, and not so much in the formal relationships between sentences or propositions.

Levinson formulates the general properties of the whole class of models to which most Discourse Analysis theorists would subscribe. They are the following:

- (i) There are unit acts -speech acts or moves- that are performed in speaking, which belong to a specifiable, delimited set.
- (ii) Utterances are segmentable into unit parts -utterance units- each of which corresponds to (at least) one unit act.

- (iii) There is a specifiable function, and hopefully a procedure, that will map utterance units into speech acts and vice versa.
- (iv) Conversational sequences are primarily regulated by a set of sequencing rules stated over speech act (or move) types. (1983: 289).

This study takes into account all these aspects for the analysis of ironic communication. Speech acts are analysed in detail, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Primary importance is here given to a) the strategies used by ironic speakers/writers to convey their meaning (an aspect not considered by Brown & Levinson in the above list, but which is nevertheless the topic of study of many pragmaticians and discourse analysts), and b) the functions intended by these speakers/writers for their ironic discourse.

When necessary, I have also resorted to some categories of analysis traditionally used by *conversational analysts*, such as *turn taking structure* or *adjacency pairs* (especially, when trying to explain the strategies employed by English speakers to convey ironic meanings).

The view of language taken in this piece of work is, therefore, a discourse-pragmatic view, which focuses on complete spoken and written texts and on the social and cultural contexts in which such language operates.

No matter how hard it is to delimit a given discipline, we can learn a great deal about its field of concern by observing what practitioners do. This is something Levinson (1983: 32) observes with regard to Pragmatics and which I believe is also valid for the study of irony. We thus now turn to some scholars

who have seriously studied irony within a pragmatic framework, in the hope of clarifying our understanding of the phenomenon by scrutinising what they have done and are doing in their analyses.

### 3.2 Grice's Cooperative Principle and theory of implicature

Before the year 1960, all semantic theories had one element in common, namely, a great concern with truth conditions (as was shown in the analysis of classical theories of irony, chapter 2). These theories were employed by logicians like Frege or Kripke, who assigned recursively to each sentence the conditions under which the sentence would be true.

The subsequent observations by linguists and philosophers of apparent differences in meaning between certain natural language words and their logical counterparts were the basis for the development of pragmatic reflexion and studies, of which Grice's lectures at Harvard on the topic "Logic and Conversation" (1967) were considered to be crucial.

The important contribution made by Grice's notion of *conversational implicature* -considered to be one of the single most important ideas in Pragmatics- provided linguistic analysts with an explicit account of how it is possible to mean more than what is actually "said". Obviously, this is basic to the study of irony. For as has been shown in the reflexion and analysis of irony made hitherto, in some way or another, when being ironic

a speaker/writer always means more than what is actually said.

As conversational implicatures are a certain kind of inference that can be derived from an utterance, they are related to what Grice called the *Cooperative Principle and its maxims*. Given the fact that our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks (and would not be rational if they did), the remarks are characteristically cooperative efforts and each participant recognises in them a mutually accepted direction (1975:45). The Cooperative Principle and its maxims are reproduced here for the sake of reference, since I shall refer to it at many points and in different sections in this piece of research.

1) THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE:

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

1) THE MAXIM OF QUANTITY

(i) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)

(ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2) THE MAXIM OF QUALITY

Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

(i) Do not say what you believe to be false

(ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3) THE MAXIM OF RELEVANCE

Be relevant

4) THE MAXIM OF MANNER

Be perspicuous, and specifically:

(i) Avoid obscurity of expression

(ii) Avoid ambiguity

(iii) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

(iv) Be orderly

(1975: 45-6)

Naturally, as Grice himself readily admits, people do not follow these guidelines to the letter, and here is where

conversational implicatures play their part. When a speaker violates or "flouts" one of the maxims, the hearer assumes that the speaker is nevertheless trying to be cooperative and looks for the meaning at some deeper level, and in doing so s/he makes an inference, namely a **conversational implicature**. And here we can bring irony to the foreground again: according to Grice (and his followers) irony is one of the prototypical examples in which a speaker is saying something which is obvious to the listener or audience as false. For instance, if after having had a car accident on his trip back home, A tells his wife

"That was a nice trip indeed!"

the wife will readily understand that A must be trying to get across some other proposition than the one he purports to be putting forward (since there is, besides, contextual evidence - the crashed car- to believe so). The most obviously related proposition in the case of irony is, for Grice, the contradictory one. Then, in this very simple example, the wife should reach the conclusion, by means of implicature, that the trip was not nice at all.

In spite of the indisputable fact that Grice's theory is illuminating, it can be said that his view of irony is not far from the classical view of it as "meaning the opposite of what is literally said", since he still seems to base the use of irony on conditions of truth or falsity, i.e., irony is a consequence of the violation of the Quality Maxim, and when this maxim is violated, the speaker is not telling the truth. But the research done in this work has found that irony can be conveyed through



the flouting of the other maxims and not exclusively the Quality Maxim. This point will be treated in chapter 5.

According to Grice, then, a speaker who wants to convey an ironic meaning will always make use of conversational implicatures and the listener will have to work out the presence of these implicatures. Paradoxically, Grice's parallel notion of conventional implicature may help us realise that this is not always the case. Consequently, I shall now continue the discussion on Grice's views by trying to explain the distinction between conventional and conversational implicature, for it seems reasonable to suggest that this discussion could throw some light on the possibility of existence of a conventionalised kind of irony.

### 3.3 Conventional and Conversational implicatures

It was explained in the previous section that conversational implicatures are triggered by the violation of some of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. Grice specifies that the presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out. In order to work out the presence of a conversational implicature, the hearer will reply on:

- 1- the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved
- 2- the Cooperative Principle and its maxims
- 3- the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance
- 4- other items of background knowledge and,
- 5- the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants

and both participants know or assume this to be the case.  
(1975: 50)

The general pattern Grice presents for the working of conversational implicature may, within this line of thought, very well be applied to the interpretation of irony. The pattern is the following:

<<He has said that p; there is no reason to suppose he is not observing the maxims, or at least the CP; he could not be doing this unless he thought that q; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks that q is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that q; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that q; and so he has implicated that q.>> (1975: 50)

There are, nevertheless, some cases in which the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, helping them to determine what is said. Thus, for instance, if I say, "she is a woman, she, therefore, doesn't drive well", I have committed myself to it being the case that the fact of driving badly is a consequence of being a woman. This is what Grice has called a *conventional implicature*.

According to Grice, no instances of irony interpretation could be analysed in the light of conventional implicatures, since, by being ironic, a speaker is always violating the Quality maxim and, consequently, forces the listener to work out a new meaning for the utterance. This is something that I believe can be argued. One of the characteristics of conversational implicatures is, according to Grice, that they are all cancellable (1978: 115). This means that "to the form of words of the

utterance of which putatively implicates that  $p$ , it is admissible to add "but not  $p$ " , or "I do not mean to imply that  $p$ ", and that it is contextually cancellable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of the words would simply not carry the implicature" (1978: 115-16).

Since Grice considers the inferences coming out after an ironic remark to be conversational implicatures, then we infer that all ironic interpretations could be cancelled. I, nevertheless, believe that there are some cases in which we could not cancel the ironic implicature, and in which we consequently could say that the implicature leading to the ironic interpretation is conventional, and not conversational.

### 3.3.1 Conventionalised irony

To be more accurate, we could speak of a kind of conventionalised implicatures for some cases of irony, for these implicatures were apparently conversational in an initial state, but their frequent use by the speakers to send an ironic message has made them conventional, in such a way that it is no longer necessary for the listeners to work out their meaning. Morgan writes about this kind of implicature (though not in connection with irony) and he calls it "short circuited implicature" (1978: 274).

Consider the following examples:

1- Somebody asks an obvious question, to which his interlocutor

answers:

"Is the Pope Catholic?"

Morgan (1978) presents this expression as one of the two or three expressions that Americans use to answer very obvious questions. This question is, at the same time, ironical because it is used as a mild sardonic criticism to mean that the question the other interlocutor made was rather stupid. Once more, the irony cannot be interpreted out of the opposite of the proposition; the irony here lies in the contrast between the answer expected by the listener and the actual answer given by the speaker, which is, in fact, another question. There is a contradiction of speech acts, and this is another valid strategy for conveying irony, as will be shown and discussed in 3.4. and 7.2.3.. It is a conventionalised type of irony because the interpretation is now always the same. Nobody who is competent in the English language will think that the speaker is really asking whether the Pope is Catholic or not.

2-

A: "I can lift a 200kg weight."

B: "Yes, and I'm Marie the Queen of Romania."

This is another of the conventionalised expressions used in an ironical way in English. By replying to A in that way, B means that s/he does not believe a word of what A says, i.e., he is conventionally implicating that A is a liar. Again, this is a sardonic, sarcastic answer in which we can observe an ironic

contrast between the expected answer or reaction and the actual reply given by B. There seems to be no other possibility of interpretation, for it is always very clear to the hearer that the speaker is not the Queen of Romania, and that s/he is consequently trying to convey a different meaning. On the other hand, the speaker in this case seems to be violating the Maxim of Relevance, for if we analyse the answer from a logical point of view, it seems to have no connection with what A said before. This logical opposition was then what originally triggered the implicature and, hence, the ironic interpretation. But, as this is an expression which has been used to convey an ironic meaning for a long time, now the implicature is "short-circuited", and it seems reasonable to suggest that it can not be cancelled; consequently, it can be considered as an instance of conventionalised irony. Brown and Yule (1983) indirectly write about this phenomenon when, in considering inferences as the "missing links" required to make an explicit connection between two apparently unconnected utterances, they write about "automatic" and "non-automatic" connections (1983: 259). The short-circuited implicature would then be an "automatic" kind of inference (though from the moment it becomes automatic, it ceases to be an inference and therefore requires no processing time and effort).

Morgan (1978) distinguishes two types of convention: *conventions of language*, that jointly give rise to the literal meanings of sentences; and *conventions of usage*, that govern the use of sentences, with their literal meanings, for certain

purposes. Examples 1 and 2 are clear instances of conventions of usage. We can speak, in these cases, of a convention specifying some particular expressions, though the convention here extends to the general strategy used. For instance, in example 1, the conventional strategy could be formulated in the following way: "Answer an obvious question with an even more obvious question, to convey that the first question was stupid and need not have been made". In example 2, the conventional strategy would be: "Reply to a lie with an even bigger lie to show that you are not being cheated".

My research has shown that in the "irony game" there are few cases (like the ones in examples 1 and 2) in which we can speak of conventionalised ironic expressions, but that there are more instances in which we can speak of conventionalised ironic strategies (these will be dealt with in detail in 7.3.3 (A.29)). "Strategy" is a key word in this study, which I am going to define and deal with in later chapters in more detail.

I now consider it necessary and appropriate to reflect upon the nature of a few more examples of irony in which the strategy, and not the expression itself, seems to have been conventionalised:

3- (taken from the television series *Three's Company*)

Jack: Can you give me an aspirin?

Room mate: What do you want it for?

Jack: To play golf with it.

Jack's answer cannot be said to be conventionalised as an ironical expression, though the strategy seems to be a common and conventionalized one not only in English but in other languages (like Spanish) as well. The strategy could be formulated: "Reply to a stupid question with an even more stupid answer". Again, we find here an opposition between question and answer, in which the ironic reply could not be analysed in terms of opposite propositions. The opposition is at a different level. Ironic speakers usually play with the absurd and ridiculous, and this is one instance in which this is done. It is absurd to say that one is going to play golf with an aspirin; absurd enough to make the listener aware of the fact that the speaker thinks his/her (the hearer's) previous utterance was ridiculous and silly. In this case, it cannot be said that the expression "to play golf with it" is always recognised as ironic, as it is the case with "Is the Pope catholic?", but "answering a stupid question with a stupid answer" can be said to be a recognized ironic strategy.

Another example that confirms the existence of this strategy can be appreciated in the following conversational exchange between Rose, Blanche and Dorothy (*The Golden Girls*):

4-

Blanche: This is good. This is all food that would have spoiled.

(They start eating and eat throughout)

Dorothy: I'm so glad that my date with Barry is tomorrow. The fat won't have time to show.

Rose: It won't?

Dorothy: No. It always takes a few days before it shows.

Rose: Where does it go in the meantime?

Dorothy: To Connecticut. How do I know where it goes?!

(GG, 1991: 28)

Here, the answer "To Connecticut" is the one that carries the implicature (which is now short-circuited) that the question was a stupid one. But the expression used could well have been "to Rome" or "to any other place", and the answer would still have been absurd and ironic. It is clear that it is the strategy which conveys the ironical criticism and not the words or particular expression.

5- A similar occurrence of the same strategy can be observed in the following conversation between Dorothy, Rose and Sophia (the "girls" are taking care of their neighbour's baby):

(Dorothy holds the baby. The baby cries)

Dorothy: There, there.

Rose: It's a colic. My children had it. You give them brandy.

Sophia: For colic?

Dorothy: Yes, After dinner. With a cigar. Rose, you give brandy for teething; you rub it on their gums.

Rose: Oh. I thought I gave it to them for colic. In their bottles. But my babies were very happy.

Sophia: Put it in my bottle; I'll be happy, too.

(GG, 1991: 43)

The whole situation and conversation is comic and presents instances of verbal irony, in one of which we can appreciate the use of the strategy previously discussed. When Dorothy says that



you give brandy to babies "after dinner, with a cigar", she is answering what she considers to be a stupid question with an even more stupid answer, and at the same time she is criticising Rose's ignorance for having put brandy in her babies' bottles. Again, the absurd answer shows the absurdity of the question or assertion made before. It is obviously ridiculous to think that Dorothy may be serious when saying that a brandy with a cigar is something good for babies' colics, so we can not say that the implicature that conveys the ironic meaning is cancellable in any case; consequently, it seems reasonable to conclude that the implicature has been "short circuited" and conventionalized, for the utterance in question will always be interpreted as an ironical utterance. A further analysis of these strategies is made in 7.3.3 (A.29).

6- Consider the use of sentences like:

"If she is pretty, then I'm the king of France."

Numberg (1981) gives a similar example to present it as an expression that involves irony and sarcasm. The formula for this kind of sentences is "If p, then q = not p", which, in plain words, means that the sentence "If she is pretty, I'm the king of France" means "She is not pretty" (or at least, "I don't believe her to be pretty"). The condition for this formula to always be valid as a means of conveying irony is that the main clause of the conditional sentence should carry an absurd proposition: in this case, the person uttering it is not the King of France, and even more, there is no present King of France,

which makes the utterance completely absurd. We are again facing a strategy which seems to have been conventionalised to express irony and that could be stated as follows: "When you do not agree with what is stated in the subordinate clause of a conditional sentence, tell a lie or say something absurd in the main clause to express your disagreement". The opposition between what the speaker asserts in the main clause (which is a lie) and the truth is what triggers the ironical interpretation of what is said in the subordinate clause. The listener should reason in the following way: "given the fact that what the speaker is saying in the main clause is not true, what he says in the subordinate clause of the same sentence can neither be true, or at least, has to be considered as absurd or ridiculous for the speaker". This reasoning seems to have been "short circuited" (given the wide and repetitive use of the formula to convey irony) and, consequently, has been incorporated as a conventional way to express irony.

Conventionalization is, thus, one of the aspects of the analysis, of which the concept of strategy seems to be an illuminating and clarifying element.

### 3.3.2 Further reflexions on the "conventionalisation" of irony

One of my secondary research questions when starting this study was whether I would find instances of lexicalised or grammaticalised irony. As was shown in the previous section,

some expressions (such as "Yes, and I'm Marie the Queen of Romania") seem to be always used in an ironical way, in which case we could speak of a conventionalisation of the words used in that case to be ironic, but it was also shown that, in most cases of conventionalisation, what is conventionalised is the strategy and not the words.

There are, however, certain expressions which seem to be always used in an ironical way. Take, for example, the expression *A likely story*, which always signifies something like "an unlikely story" or "I don't believe what you say". I believe we can say here that we are facing a case of conventionalised, lexicalised irony, since the ironic interpretation will always accompany these particular words, and not, for example, "*A possible story*", in which case the ironic interpretation is not the only interpretation one could give. Another expression that seems to be a case of established irony is quoted by Numberg (1981). Numberg points out that both Americans and English use the expression *not much* in an ironical way, to express scepticism about what somebody else has said, but only the English use *not many, Benny*, to indicate scepticism as to an assertion about quantity. In the case of *not much*, we perhaps cannot speak about conventionalized irony because it can also be used with other meanings, but in the case of *not many, Benny* we can, for it is always used to express the aforementioned scepticism.

M. Bрева Claramonte and J. García Alonso (1993), in a study of the slang used in the graffiti of a United States university, note that it is interesting how some slang words that now have

a positive meaning had a negative value corresponding to their literal or non-slang senses. These words are *awesome*, *groovy*, *cool* and *blast*. Thus *awesome* still means -in standard English- "frightening, inspiring terror", while it means something like "excellent, wonderful, thrilling" in slang. *Groovy* has the same slang sense, but it originally meant "routine, commonplace". This lexico-semantic phenomenon is known by the name of antiphrasis and is quite a productive process in the development of slang vocabulary. Brea Claramonte and García Alonso state that "this type of semantic changes is motivated by an underlying reaction on the part of the language user against the mainstream culture, by a desire to show irony, or by an internal urge to resort to humorous speech" (1993: 26). These examples are perhaps different from the previous ones, since, once they become established as slang forms, the intention of being ironic is perhaps lost, but, as the authors say, the original aim was to show irony and humour. Thus, I still believe we can say these are cases of lexicalised irony, and, what is more interesting, they can be considered to be cases of lexicalised "positive" irony (as will be defined in chapter 5 with respect to positive and negative politeness), for they are clear cases of words having an origin of negative meaning used to convey positive attitudes and meanings. Another expression that appears to be an instance of lexicalised "positive" irony is the expression *break a leg*, used by theatre people to wish an actor good luck before a performance. Here, something which taken literally is the expression of a bad wish, is used to convey a good wish for

the listener, and this is the only way of conveying it. It would not have the same ironic effect if the speaker said "break an arm", which shows that the verbal irony has been conventionalised and lexicalised. Booth (1974) speaks of this phenomenon as "stable irony" and illustrates his point by means of two examples in which the irony is firmly built into the usual terms for things: tall men nicknamed *Shorty* in western America, and blind men called *Men with a thousand eyes* in one part of India (1974: 40).

We may, then, speak of some very particular and punctual examples of lexicalized irony. In the course of this investigation, I have also come across certain words and expressions that show a tendency to be used ironically, though they cannot be considered as complete lexicalised or grammaticalised examples, because they can also be used in non-ironic contexts. I refer, for example, to the adjective *fine* or the verb *seem*. *Fine* appears to be a word preferred by English speakers for the expression of some prototypical examples of irony, such as the one presented in the previous chapter (section 2.3):

A: "You're a fine friend."

It seems to be the case that, when willing to be ironic, English speakers prefer to use *fine* and not, for instance, *good*. This does not mean that in a given situation somebody may say "you're a good friend" and not be ironic, but it does mean that in

general the most preferred adjective would be *fine*. Word order seems to be important here, for it appears to be the case that when somebody says "A fine friend you are", the utterance tends to be interpreted more in sarcastic terms than when it has the more normal order "you are a fine friend". R. Gibbs (1986), in fact, presents the former as "a sentence form that is conventionally used sarcastically". However, this preference for the adjective *fine* to be used with ironic meanings is observed only in relation to certain topics or words, for it is not usual to associate the "fine" of, e.g. "It's a fine day" with any ironic understatements.

Wayne Booth gives an example which I believe to be an illustration of the use of ironic *fine*, quoting Stendhall in *The Charterhouse of Parma*:

"The Marchese del Dongo was given a high position, and as he combined the most sordid avarice with a host of other *fine* qualities...". (1974: 67)

The same appears to occur with the verb *seem*. An example could be taken from my own recollection of an occasion on which I was invited to an outdoor barbecue at the University of Utah, U.S.A.. One of the guests was eating very much, without stopping and even without being able to speak with his friends, so one of his friends addressed him and said:

"It seems you're hungry"

Of course, this was considered a joke, and everybody laughed. Irony is conveyed here by means of "hedging". By saying that her

friend "seemed to" rather than "it was obvious" that he was hungry, the speaker was "softening" her possible criticism about her friend's greediness.

Another humorous and ironical example of the use of the verb *seem* is found in the following conversation exchange taken from *Yes, Minister*. Hacker (the Minister), in his idealistic search for "open government", has given express orders to release to the press a piece of information that will certainly threaten an Anglo-American Trade Agreement and that will surely lead him to the end of his career as a Minister if he does not change his mind:

Humphrey: The Minister and I believe in open government. We want to throw open windows and let in a bit of fresh air, isn't that right, Minister?

Arnold: Well Minister, it's a good party stuff, but it puts the Prime Minister in a very difficult situation personally.

Hacker: What about our commitment to open government?

Arnold: This seems to be the closed season for open government.

(YM, 1994 video episode: "Open Government")

More examples could be provided of these and other words which show a certain tendency to be used ironically, but the ones given are considered to be sufficient in order to signal or point to the fact that such a tendency exists for some words or expressions.

I shall now turn my attention to another of the prominent issues within pragmatic studies, namely, speech act theory, and

I shall try to look into the ways in which irony is connected to such a theory.

### 3.4 Irony and speech acts

In the famous lectures that were posthumously published as *How to do things with words* (1962), Austin set about demolishing the view that truth conditions should be considered as central to language understanding. He developed a general theory of illocutionary acts, which, in turn, became a central concern of general pragmatic theory. In saying something, Austin observes, we are also doing something, and, hence, three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed:

- (i) Locutionary act: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference.
- (ii) Illocutionary act: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it.
- (iii) Perlocutionary act: the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering a sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.

(1962: 101-2)

The term *speech act* has come to refer exclusively to the second kind, i.e. the illocutionary act, since this is the one that seems to present the richest developments and



interpretations within pragmatic theory.

Searle's later systematization of Austin's work (1976), in which he proposes a typology of speech acts based on felicity conditions, became very influential. Austin and Searle's position can be formulated by saying that all utterances not only serve to express propositions, but also to perform actions. The illocutionary act or, more simply, the speech act, is at a privileged level within these actions.

In the framework of irony studies, the most interesting type of speech acts would be what Searle called *indirect speech acts*. Searle demonstrates that "in hints, insinuations, irony and metaphor, to mention a few examples, the speaker's utterance meaning and the sentence meaning come apart in various ways" (1975: 59).

Searle also indicates that an important class of indirect speech acts is that in which the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more. That is, a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, in addition, another type of illocutionary act. This opens up our spectrum of possibilities in a considerable way for the analysis of irony. We have already seen that the ironic speaker/writer sometimes does not mean what he says (as in the prototypical examples). There are some other times, however, in which, according to the findings of this research, the speaker does mean what he says and s/he also means something else. This can be certified by some of the examples that have been presented so far, as well as by

the following ones:

1- A wife who is arguing with her husband and suddenly says:

"I wish I had an understanding husband."

The wife means what she says, because she really wants to have a more understanding husband, but, at the same time she is criticising her husband by implying that he is not an understanding person. The irony is conveyed here by means of the presupposition coming out of the expression "I wish I had" -which presupposes that "I don't have"- (in fact it can be said that the irony here is derived from the conventional implicatures coming out of the words used, producing an "implicature-free" kind of verbal irony, a type that will be proposed in 7.2.2). Besides, she is stating something and, at the same time, is being reproachful to her husband, which illustrates that Searle's point discussed above is also valid in cases of irony, i.e., an illocutionary act that is meant but nevertheless uttered in such a way as to perform another illocutionary act at the same time.

2- (Taken from *The Golden Girls*)

Blanche: I don't need a song!. I just want to be young and beautiful and healthy again.

Dorothy: Blanche, that's what we all want.

Blanche: I know -but I deserve it. (1991: 178)

Blanche means what she says, and so she is "stating" something,

but she is also implying that the other girls do not deserve to be young, beautiful and healthy, which constitutes a witty ironical criticism. Again, the irony here is not conveyed through conversational implicature but through presupposition, in this case coming out of the word "but" (a reflexion that should be connected to the analysis made in 3.3.1 and 7.2.2).

We have thus seen that irony can also manifest itself at the illocutionary level of the speech act. There are instances in which the irony is interpreted out of an opposition of speech acts, showing, again, a manifestation that is set apart from the conventional idea of an opposition of propositions. Consider the case in which a teacher is angry at her students' behaviour (they are talking and not paying attention to her explanations), and so she says in a loud voice and showing annoyance in her expression:

3- "May I continue with my explanations?"  
or: "Would you allow me to carry on?"

She is being ironical by asking for permission to go ahead, but implicating that she should not be doing this, since she is the teacher, and, in general, in such a situation, it is the students who should be asking for permission to talk. Then we could say that the teacher is using the "opposite" or, better, a contradictory speech act, for she is asking for permission when she should be giving an order. The interpretation of this tells

us that she changes the speech act ironically in order to indirectly criticize the students' behaviour. Robin Lakoff (1972) writes about the use of "sarcastic *please*" when explaining that "if an officer in the Army (a subculture with special status-related rules) gives a command to a private, he will not normally preface his command with *please*. "Although in most English speaking groups the use of *please* prefaced to an imperative is a mark of politeness, to use *please* in this situation will be interpreted as sarcastic" (1972: 911). In this case, the officer would be making an apparent request when he should be making a command instead. Again, it can be seen that the opposition lies in the speech act and not in the proposition.

These last examples lead us to the reflexion that expressing opposition seems to be something inherent in verbal irony, but this opposition does not necessarily have to be found at the level of the proposition . It may be made manifest at other levels, such as that of the speech act, as I am trying to show herein.

H. Haverkate, in his article "A Speech Act Analysis of Irony" presents the following example:

4- "Could you do me the favour of shutting up?" (1990: 85)

which is an ironical way of telling someone to stop talking. The question is the explicit act, the request is the implicit one. In fact, the question is a rhetorical one, for it is not expected to be answered (we have already seen and shall see later that

rhetorical questions are good and accepted strategies to convey irony). Both examples 3 and 4 are also examples of Negative Politeness used to convey irony, a fact that will be discussed carefully in chapter 5, and which has to do with Research Hypothesis n° 8. A similar instance could be given by the following remark, made by a mother to her son after having asked him to make his bed and seeing the son's slowness of response:

"Why don't you take your time and make the bed?"

The mother is asking a rhetorical question, and, at the same time she is trying to urge her son to make the bed by being sarcastic about his sluggishness. What she really means is something like:

"Come on, hurry up and do it".

Let us now illustrate this co-occurrence of speech acts (an explicit and an implicit one) by means of another example from the corpus. The aforementioned first episode of the series "Yes, Minister" finishes with an ironical remark by Humphrey (the Minister's secretary). Humphrey is a witty character who always makes the Minister do what he wants. The situation is as follows: the Minister (Hacker) gave the order to publish a Manifesto (in the name of his "open government") that would seriously damage Britain's relations with the United States. Then Hacker was informed of the Prime Minister's annoyance at having taken such a decision without having gone through the proper channels first. Hacker realises he has made a mistake and thinks it is now the end of his career since the Manifesto will be published at noon that very same day. Humphrey had blocked this publication without telling Hacker, but when he sees Hacker

in such an embarrassing situation, he tells him that he "had made a mistake" and, consequently, had not allowed the Manifesto to be published. Hacker, of course, feels relieved, but in order not to show it (and consequently not to acknowledge he "put his foot in it"), he says:

Hacker: That's O.K. Humphrey. After all, we all make mistakes

Humphrey: Yes, Minister.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: "Open Government")

Humphrey's answer (with a strong falling stress on the word "yes") apparently shows acceptance and submission to what the Minister says, but, in fact, it is an ironical remark that shows no submission at all, for he is implying that it was the Minister who made the mistake and not himself. This happens all through the series; Humphrey pretends to accept everything Hacker says and orders, but he actually does whatever he wants, and, consequently, it is he who gives the orders. Therefore, the title of this programme, "Yes, Minister", is completely ironical and representative of the irony that is found in all the episodes.

Verbal irony can thus be expressed through a wide variety of illocutionary acts. I shall now proceed to analyse irony in the light of Searle's typology of speech acts.

### 3.4.1 Irony and Searle's typology of speech acts

Haverkate (1990) classifies irony in accordance with the taxonomic criteria proposed by Searle (1976) for speech acts. Searle proposes five basic classes of speech acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. Haverkate notes that irony manifests itself predominantly in the performance of assertives, but also presents examples of directive, commissive and expressive irony. He excludes declarative speech acts because they are performed by means of performative formulas to which no sincerity condition applies (1990: 89). I shall briefly illustrate his typology by means of the following examples:

- a) **Assertive irony:** One of the examples Haverkate considers is when a speaker addresses the hearer to express his anger at the impolite behaviour of a third person and says:

"I love people with good manners."

Haverkate cleverly explains that, here, the speaker does not intend to mean the opposite of what he says (i.e., "I hate people with good manners") but, rather, to implicate that the person who has aroused his anger does not belong to the class of people with good manners (1990: 92).

- b) **Directive irony:** An example of directive irony (i.e., irony expressed through a directive) could be given by a mother who is tired of telling her son not to walk barefooted (for he

could catch a cold) and the son never obeys, so she says :

"Very well, keep on walking barefooted!"

This example fits in rather accurately within classical definitions of irony, for what the mother really means is "That is not very well" and "Do not keep on walking barefooted", though, when seen from the standpoint of speech act theory, this presents richer possibilities of analysis.

- c) **Commissive irony:** By making use of the syntactic structure of commissives, a speaker can perform an ironic commissive speech act in order to, for instance, intimidate the hearer. It then takes the form of a rhetorical question, as in:

"Do you want me to throw you out of the room?"

- d) **Expressive irony:** Paradigmatic cases of expressive speech acts are "to thank", "to congratulate" or "to condole". A speaker could ironically utter the following:

"I thank you for having been so cooperative."

in a context in which it is evident that the addressee did not cooperate at all. Haverkate states that "there seems to be a general constraint on the ironic performance of expressive speech acts, namely, the constraint that irony is incompatible with those acts that serve to convey feelings of sympathy" (1990: 110). I nevertheless believe this is not always true, since in some particular circumstances (in which there is a close relationship between two friends and there is an atmosphere in which joking is expected and likely to occur)



someone could say to a friend who has won a prize:

"I condole with you on your winning of the First Prize."

This has an ironic effect, and it is a case of what I shall later (chapter 5) call "positive irony".

Haverkate's illustration of verbal irony in relation to the different types of speech act shows a great deal of reflexion on the nature of irony and is of great help to any analyst. There are, nevertheless, some points in his argumentation that I believe can be refuted, and I shall, consequently, argue against them in the following section.

3.4.1.1. Argumentation against two points in Haverkate's claims:  
Testing Research Hypothesis n° 3

As was specified above, Haverkate excludes declarative speech acts from his typology, claiming that the sincerity condition does not apply to this type of act, and, consequently, no ironic interpretation could be derived from them. There are two points in this assumption of Haverkate's that I would like to argue against, given that the analysis of the data in the corpus has thrown evidence against them:

1) It is not necessary that the sincerity condition apply in all cases of irony. This would mean (and in fact is what Haverkate means) that we can only attain irony through the violation of the quality maxim. We have seen in examples 1

and 2 in the last section that sometimes we can be ironic and sincere at the same time (and we shall see in chapter 5 how we can be ironic by flouting other maxims than the Quality Maxim). The argumentation against this point will be carried out in detail in chapter 5, for it is in close connection to Politeness Theory. I shall here concentrate on the argumentation concerning the following point.

2) Declarative speech acts can also be used to convey irony. There is a very interesting example in *The Complete Yes, Minister* (the written version of the television series). In this passage the Minister's wife ironically complains about the fact that her husband and his political adviser are together most of the time:

<<The phone rang. I grabbed it. It was Frank Weisel, my political adviser, saying that he was on his way over. I told Annie, who wasn't pleased. "Why doesn't he just move in?" she asked bitterly. Sometimes I just don't understand her. I patiently explained to her that, as my political adviser, I depend on Frank more than anyone. "Then why don't you marry him?" she asked. "I now pronounce you man and political adviser. Whom politics has joined let no wife put asunder.>> (1989: 12).

It seems reasonable to assert that Hacker's wife is making use of sardonic echoic irony by reproducing the performative (declarative) act of *marrying* when she says "I now pronounce you man and political adviser. Whom politics has joined let no wife put asunder". She is trying to ridicule the situation of mutual

dependency existing between Hacker and his political adviser, and, to that purpose, she substitutes some "key" words for the normal words that would be used in a real marriage ceremony, and this is one of the aspects (together with context, tone of voice, etc.) that allows the ironic interpretation. Thus, this example shows that Haverkate's statement claiming that "declarative speech acts can not be used to convey irony" can be argued against by using precisely the claims made by speech act theory. In other words, this is simply one more case of "indirect speech act", in which the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform another type of illocutionary act.

By simulating the performative act of marrying, Hacker's wife is, in fact, performing an assertive kind of speech act, which could be materialised in the following words: "I'm tired of your being together most of the time and, consequently, of not having time for myself and my husband to lead a normal, private life". I sincerely see no difference between this instance of indirect speech act and the other examples presented by Haverkate under the headings of assertive, commissive, directive and expressive indirect speech acts conveying irony. The only difference with the examples presented by Haverkate is that the indirect speech act here is realised neither through assertives, nor through commissives, directives or expressives, but through a declarative speech act which gives evidence in favour of the second part of my Research Hypothesis n° 3 (i.e., the part that states that irony can manifest itself even through declarative

speech acts), and which, consequently, is proof against Haverkate's assumption in his article "A speech act analysis of irony".

As was stated above, Haverkate's analysis and typology of irony are very interesting and rather illuminating, but there is still much more to be said about irony, and I believe this "much more" can be better said if we use the concept of strategy, on which my typology (chapter 7) will be based.

### 3.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have tried to place irony within a pragmatic framework for the present study. I have analysed irony in relation to Grice's Cooperative Principle and implicatures, as well as in relation to speech acts.

I have also tried to search for conventional uses of irony, and it has been concluded that there are indeed certain cases of "conventionalised" irony (that have undergone the "short-circuit" process), some of which can be said to be examples of lexicalisation of irony, while some others present what I understand to be a conventionalisation of the *strategy* used. This has, then, given us qualitative evidence to accept Research Hypothesis n°2, which states that irony can be conveyed not only through conversational implicature, but also through conventional implicature.

The analysis of irony within speech act theory has permitted

to show that irony can manifest itself not only at the propositional level but also at the illocutionary level of the speech act. It could also be shown and argued, contrary to Haverkate (1990), that irony can manifest itself through declarative (performative) speech acts as well. This is precisely what was stated at the beginning (chapter one) in Research Hypothesis n° 3.

But there are many aspects of irony that have not been mentioned yet. At the beginning of this chapter, it was indicated that it was necessary for any pragmatic account of language to have access to some psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic information. That is why we will now (chapter 4) look into irony in the light of some psycholinguistic theories, including Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, and that is also why a sociolinguistic approach such as Politeness Theory will be discussed and analysed in chapter 5.

Chapter 4: IRONY AS A PSYCHIC AND

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

<<To be ironic means that one is conscious that one's own existence is itself a contradiction.>>

R. Harvey Brown, *Dialectical Irony, Literary Form, and Sociological Theory*

#### 4.1 Irony and the mind

Irony is as much a psychic phenomenon as it is a linguistic one. Many psychologists and psycholinguists have approached the study of the subject in their search for the intricate mental mechanisms whereby meanings are conveyed. Indeed, irony always seems to be a proof of elaborate thoughts and delicate strategies occurring both in the mind of the ironist and of the person or people who have to interpret it.

Psychologists such as David Rumelhart (1979) have focused part of their research on issues such as the comprehension of literal and conveyed meanings, trying to state whether this comprehension is fundamentally different in both cases. Rumelhart notices that figurative speech appears in children's speech from the very beginning and so argues that "the processes involved in the comprehension of nonliteral speech are part of our language production and comprehension equipment from the very start" and that "far from being a special aspect of linguistic or pragmatic competence, it is the very basis for this

competence" (1979:81). He does not agree with Grice in that language is comprehended by first computing the literal meaning and then, if it violates some rule of conversation, somehow calculating the conveyed meaning. He holds the hypothesis that indirect requests, for example, can be understood as quickly as direct ones and that the processes involved in the comprehension of non-figurative language are no less dependent on knowledge of the world than those involved in figurative language. For Rumelhart thinks that there are also conventions to understand literal meaning and that literal meaning also depends on context.

Sigmund Freud approached the subject of irony in his well-known analysis of jokes in *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious* (1905). I shall deal with his findings in a more detailed manner later in this chapter, for I consider *humour* to be an important aspect of irony that cannot be left unattended.

Several theories about verbal irony and sarcasm have been set forward by linguists, which have helped psychologists in their research. I refer to Sperber & Wilson's *Echoic Mention* (1981) (later *Echoic Interpretation*) Theory, Clark & Gerrig's *Pretence Theory* (1984), Sperber & Wilson's *Relevance Theory* (1986), Kreuz & Glucksberg's *Echoic Reminder Theory* (1989). I shall try to analyse all these theories and argue some points in them that do not seem to be highly convincing. Every one of the theories seems to point to a given aspect or feature of irony, but none of them seems to cover all possible occurrences of the phenomenon. None of them seems to be comprehensive enough to account for all cases of irony.



In particular, I shall discuss the points that have to do with Research Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6 (stated in the introductory chapter), and I shall try to give evidence for them by means of examples taken from the corpus.

#### 4.2 Echoic Mention Theory

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their 1981 article *Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction* claim that both the traditional account and Grice's account of irony fail to explain why an ironic utterance should ever be preferred to its literal counterpart. According to Sperber & Wilson, Grice's account also fails to make explicit exactly how the move from literal meaning to conversational implicature is made in the case of irony, as well as to show that the conversational implicatures involved in irony are of the same type as the more standard cases of conversational implicature (1981: 296).

Sperber & Wilson try to show that there is a necessary (though not sufficient) semantic condition for an utterance to be ironical, and they intend to explain why ironical utterances are made and why they occasionally (but not always) implicate the opposite of what they literally say. They hold that researchers on the topic should be looking for psychological mechanisms that can account for the effects of ironic utterances and their interrelationships. The whole notion of figurative meaning is rejected by these authors, on the grounds that almost every utterance can be figurative and ambiguous, having possible

semantic interactions among its individual ambiguous constructions.

The essence of Sperber & Wilson's 1981 theory of verbal irony is laid upon the distinction drawn in philosophy between the use and the mention of an expression. "Use of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to; mention of an expression involves reference to the expression itself" (1981: 303). The authors' explanation that "when the expression mentioned is a complete sentence, it does not have the illocutionary force it would standardly have in a context where it was used" shows that the remark in a) is uttered in b) without actually being made:

a) "What is irony?"

b) "What is irony" is the wrong question"

(1981: 305)

One type of mention of a proposition is echoic mention. Ironic utterances are presented by Sperber & Wilson as cases of echoic mention. Basic to Sperber & Wilson's theory is the claim that all cases of irony involve mention of a proposition which is interpreted as echoing the opinion that the speaker wants to characterise as ludicrously inappropriate or irrelevant, as can be seen in the following situation: a person invites his friend for a walk considering that, in his opinion, "the weather will be lovely". Later, they go for a walk, and it starts to rain. The friend then ironically echoes his remark by saying "What lovely weather!". In Sperber and Wilson's view, the mentioned propositions are ones that have been or might have been actually

entertained by someone. In my opinion, this gives the characterisation of irony a rather loose interpretation, and this is something I will discuss in this chapter. The opening move in the line of argumentation of this chapter is thus to argue against Sperber and Wilson's thesis on the always-echoic character of irony. Another aspect to be considered, discussed and argued within this theory is the authors' statement that, in most cases, irony has victims and that it always conveys a derogatory attitude.

Echoic Mention Theory was subsequently tested by Jorgensen, Miller & Sperber by means of a reading comprehension test, the results of which were presented in the article *Test of the Mention Theory of Irony* (1984). The test involved anecdotes that satisfied the traditional criterion for irony but could include or omit antecedents for echoic mention. Results favoured the mention theory of irony. However, in my opinion, this cannot be presented as a proof that all ironic utterances are echoic. The fact that the echoic mention theory seems to be a better theory than the traditional one (stating that ironic utterances mean "the opposite" of their literal meanings), does not imply that it is the best theory or the one that covers all the versatility of the phenomenon.

Before discussing the points that I consider to be arguable in this theory, it is necessary to say something about the evolution of Sperber & Wilson's ideas of verbal irony as they are shown in their subsequently developed *Relevance Theory*.

### 4.3 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory has to do with cognitive psychology and the study of reasoning. Sperber & Wilson claim that human cognition has a goal: we pay attention only to those pieces of information which seem to be relevant. This single property, *relevance*, is seen as the key to human communication and cognition.

In Relevance Theory, verbal communication is understood as involving a speaker producing an utterance as a public interpretation of one of his/her thoughts, and a hearer constructing a mental interpretation of this utterance. Stated differently, an utterance is an interpretive expression of a thought of the speaker's, and the hearer makes an interpretive assumption about the speaker's informative intention. Sperber & Wilson state that they see "no reason to postulate a convention, presumption, maxim or rule of literalness to the effect that this interpretation must be a literal reproduction. How close the interpretation is, and in particular when it is literal, can be determined on the basis of the principle of relevance" (1986: 231). From the standpoint of Relevance Theory, then, there is no reason to think that the optimally relevant interpretive expression of a thought is always the most literal one. Speakers are expected to aim at optimal relevance, not at literal truth. Besides, the optimal interpretive expression of a thought should require as little processing effort as possible.

As regards irony, these authors argue that it involves an interpretive relation between the speaker's thought and

attributed thoughts or utterances. But apart from all these theoretical considerations that are useful to place verbal irony within the framework of this cognitive theory, irony here is treated basically in the same way as in the authors' previous and aforementioned articles. The argument in favour of echoic interpretation is put forward once more. They restate their previous ideas by saying that an echoic utterance need not interpret a precisely attributable thought: "it may echo the thought of a certain kind of person or of people in general" (1986: 238). By doing this, a speaker can express his own attitude to the thought echoed; that is why Sperber & Wilson argue that verbal irony invariably involves the implicit expression of an attitude. Specifically, the relevance of an ironical utterance invariably depends on the information it conveys about the speaker's attitude to the opinion echoed. To all this argumentation, the authors add the following remark: "the attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind. The speaker dissociates herself from the opinion echoed and indicates that she does not hold it herself" (1986: 239).

The only difference in the treatment of irony between Relevance Theory and Sperber & Wilson's previous proposal (Echoic Mention Theory) is the clarification made by them in one of the back notes of the book (note 25, p.263), in which they state that they now realise that the notion of "mention" does not really stretch to cover the full range of cases they propose to handle. "Mention" is a self-referential use of language, and, as such,

it requires full linguistic or logical identity between representation and original. They therefore explain that they have abandoned the term "mention" in favour of the more general term "interpretation".

Two more of the arguments put forward by this theory include: a) the possibility of expressing oneself ironically as being a logical consequence of verbal communication rather than of some extra level of competence; b) the fact that there is a continuum of cases rather than a dividing line between ironic utterances and other echoic utterances, i.e., irony involves no departure from a norm and no transgression of a rule, convention or maxim (a claim that is against Grice's view of the problem).

Sperber & Wilson reconfirm their position towards irony in a later article called *On Verbal Irony* (1992), in which they claim that considerations of relevance lie at the heart of verbal communication, and, consequently, they hold that Relevance Theory is the best theoretical framework available for the explanation of verbal irony.

#### 4.3.1 Discussion of Sperber & Wilson's ideas about irony: argumentation testing Research Hypotheses 4 and 5

As was said above, Sperber and Wilson's conception of irony opens up a wider scope of possibilities for irony interpretation than the one opened by the traditional conception, and thus it allows many more cases of irony to fit within a theory. Diane Blakemore, a follower of Sperber and Wilson's theory, shows this by means of examples of irony that would be very difficult to be

labelled as meaning the opposite of their propositions (something I have also done in chapter 2). Two of such examples are:

a) "Did you remember to water the garden?"

produced on a very rainy day;

b) "Oh! to be in England,

Now that April's there."

produced on a cold wet day during an English spring. (1992: 165)

In spite of the clear step forward given by this new formulation of the problem, I believe that some aspects of this interpretation could still be argued, and this is what I shall try to justify in the following four sections.

#### 4.3.1.1 Are all cases of verbal irony echoic?

The opinions or thoughts that are being echoed are not always so clearly recognised or traced. In many ironical utterances, there seems to be no previous opinion or expression being mentioned. It is true that Sperber and Wilson say (as was quoted above) that sometimes the ironic utterance may echo the "thought of people in general" (1986: 238), but then it can be argued that any utterance could be echoic because any thought may be in the minds of people in general. So the fact of being echoic would not only be a characteristic of ironic utterances, but of all possible utterances. Consequently, for ironic utterances, the condition of being echoic would not be a very

revealing discovery. Martin (1992) points to the problem this theory creates by presenting the following example:

<<Suppose that, leaving my apartment in the usual way, I trip and sprain my ankle. *Oh, great. That's nice!*, I say. Is it reasonable to claim that I am making fun of the sort of person who treats a sprained ankle as a bit of luck?>> (1992: 80)

Martin then concludes that, in such cases of irony, we are not echoing any type of person or any illusory type of mind; we are simply angry at the way things are, at the way fate conspires against us, a fact that leads him to conclude that "it is not always the (real or imagined) originator of the opinion echoed who is the target of the irony: the target can well be reality itself, which makes the echoed opinion false or irrelevant" (1992: 81).

The findings in the research done for this thesis (of which I shall present the quantitative results in chapter 7) show that, indeed, many instances of irony may fall within echoic interpretation, but many others may not. I shall illustrate this by presenting some examples in the corpus which can clearly be considered as displaying echoic irony, and by presenting the counterexamples immediately after.

#### 4.3.1.1.1 Some examples of echoic irony found in the corpora

I shall here present some of the discourse chunks in the corpus which can be unequivocally identified as cases of echoic verbal irony. Consider, first, the following two examples taken from the television series *Yes, Minister*:



1- Hacker (the Minister) had asked Humphrey (his Secretary) to write some proposals (which Humphrey was, in fact, reluctant to write) and, as it involved heavy work, Humphrey had to stay working all night and could not sleep. When he arrived at his office the following day, he looked tired. After reading the proposals to the Minister and telling him he had to work all night, Hacker says:

Hacker: It must have been quite a night.

to which Humphrey replies:

Humphrey: Yes, Minister, quite a night.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: *Big Brother*)

I believe the irony here is clear and does not need much explanation. It is evident that Humphrey is echoing the Minister to mean that it was a tiring night indeed, and to express, by means of understatement, that he was not happy having to stay overnight to work.

2- The following chunk of dialogue can not be understood as ironic if we do not know in advance that, in a previous moment of the episode, Humphrey told Hacker that he could not give him certain information about the previous Minister because "his lips were sealed". Knowing this, it is easy to see why Hacker is now being ironic:

Humphrey: Where did you get those proposals from?

Hacker: Humphrey, my lips are sealed.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: *Big Brother*)

The Minister is taking his revenge by now keeping some information away from Humphrey, who had previously done the same to Hacker. Thus, by repeating Humphrey's own words, he is being ironic and tries to tell Humphrey that now he has the right to be silent about issues he considers are none of Humphrey's business. Again, the Echoic Theory of irony seems to be appropriate for the description of the irony involved in this case.

3- Consider now the following conversational exchange between Dorothy and Blanche, in which Dorothy is sarcastic towards Blanche by repeating Blanche's ideas, though not the exact words previously uttered by her:

Dorothy: Yeah, I've been sitting here looking through the book, and I can't believe how many of my classmates are gone.

Blanche: Hmm...

Dorothy: (Looks at book)  
I mean, look. Frank Bonitardi. Tight end on the football team. Heart attack. Dead.

Blanche: Well, Dorothy, don't think of it as Frank being dead. Just think of it as God telling Frank to go deep.

Dorothy: (Back to book)  
Oh... David Brittingham...

Blanche: What happened to him?

Dorothy: God told David to drive into a wall at eighty miles an hour.

(GG, 1991: 132)

Dorothy's answer shows scorn for Blanche's previous suggestion

as to the way she should look at her friend Frank's death, and, to that purpose, she echoes her ideas in a particularly ironic manner which is intended to be a manifestation of her discontent with such ideas, and which is evidently humorous to the audience. This is one more case in which there can be no argument against the echoic thesis.

4- In the following example, taken from *The London Lund Corpus*, two friends are holding a long telephone conversation. On repeated occasions (before the part reproduced here), they have criticised a person called Damian, saying they disagree with those who love him or think he is valuable as a friend.

```

B 1212^I en_joyed . I ^still re!m\ember# /
B 1112^that !{f\irst 'arts 'thing I did) l\ast 'year# /
A 1112it was ^[dhi: ?@m ?@m] the :K\enwood 'one# /
A 1112^w\asn't it# /
B 1112^n\o# /
B 1112it was the ^one bef\ore 'that# /
B 1112I ^think 'Robert pro'duced (\one) be:fore 'you /
B 1112c\ame# /
B 1112*it ^was the lone of [@m] . !M\atjev## /
A 1112*^ah y\es#;- -*; /
A 1112"^oh y\es# . /
A 1112^y\es# /
A 1112+^y\es#+ /
A 1112**^y\es##** /
B 1112and ^I "!!\oved 'that# /
B 1112and +^every+body _else was being so !st\upid a'bout/ /
B 1112it# /
B 1112**in^cluding** a'gain :dear 'Dan :D\amian# /
B 2012[@m] *. ( - giggles) /
A 1112*^y/es# /
A 1112((^[^m]# . /
A 1112^y=es# . /
A 1112^y\es#))* /

```

(LLC, 9.1)

Although there is no part in the dialogue where anybody referred

to Damian as "dear Damian", it can be said that B is making use of echoic irony to speak of him, since in this case (according to Sperber & Wilson) he would be echoing the supposed thoughts of the people who love Damian and who think he is dear to them. This case fits not only within echoic theory but also within the classical-traditional formulation of irony, for it can be said that the speaker here means the opposite of his proposition, namely, that "Damian is not a dear person to him" or that Damian is not "his cup of tea".

The examples of echoic irony found in the different corpora will be quantitatively analysed in chapter 8. I shall now turn to the more interesting cases to which no echoic interpretation can be given and shall try to discuss and argue against Sperber & Wilson's claim that echoic-interpretation theory holds good for all cases of verbal irony.

#### 4.3.1.1.2 Counterexamples: non-echoic irony

Consider the following dialogue between Dorothy and Blanche (from *The Golden Girls*) in which Blanche, who is very worried about her age and always wants to be young and sexy, is following an exercise video on television because she wants to be fit and look attractive for her boyfriend, who happens to be many years her junior:

1-

Blanche: Oww... my back

Dorothy: Blanche, are you all right?

Blanche: No. But I have to go on. No pain, no gain. I have to look good for Dirk. A man his age is used to a trim body with a good tone

Dorothy: Then buy him a princess phone

(GG, 1991: 67)

Dorothy's last remark is ironical in that it implicates that no matter how hard Blanche tries to be fit and youthful, she will never be able to look as young as Dirk. There is even a further interpretation that leads the watcher or reader to realise that Dorothy does not approve of Blanche's relationship with so young a man (which can more clearly be seen throughout the episode). This, I believe, is an example of irony, but it does not seem to be a case of echoic mention. I do not see what expression or thought the ironic utterance "then buy him a princess phone" is echoing. According to Sperber and Wilson's echoic theory, in this case, the ironic words used by Dorothy should have been previously used or thought of by Blanche, which does not seem to be the case. The irony here lies in the absurdity of Dorothy's conclusion, which should make the hearer (Blanche, in this case) infer that Blanche's aspirations of being younger are also absurd. Dorothy implies that the nearest thing to a trim body with a good tone that Blanche can give Dirk is "a princess phone" and not Blanche herself, consequently implicating that Blanche will never look younger. Dorothy is ridiculing Blanche, but she is not doing it by echoing any words said by her before; on the contrary, she is using a new expression and idea ("then buy him a princess phone") to ironically criticise Blanche.

Consider this other piece of ironic discourse, in which B. Russell is bitterly criticising some religious ideas:

2-

<<According to St Thomas the soul is not transmitted with the semen, but is created afresh with each man. There is, it is true, a difficulty: when a man is born out of wedlock, this seems to make God an accomplice in adultery. This objection, however, is only specious. There is a grave objection which troubled St. Augustine, and that is as to the transmission of original sin. It is the soul that sins, and if the soul is not transmitted, but created afresh, how can it inherit the sin of Adam? This is not discussed by St. Thomas.>>

(BR, 1958: 40)

The remark "this seems to make God an accomplice in adultery" is highly sarcastic and ironic, but does not appear to be echoing any person's thought or utterance<sup>1</sup>. Russell is indeed criticising and ridiculing St. Thomas' religious ideas, but does not make use of his words or previous thoughts to convey the irony in this case. Russell's comment is rather a sardonic conclusion reached by himself (and by no other person previously) in order to show his critical intention to the reader. This conclusion is ironic because of the contradiction that it seems to show between the ideas supposedly held by the church and the logical conclusion at which an analyst of these ideas arrives, i.e. that God is an accomplice in adultery, a conclusion which would not be consciously supported by St. Thomas or by any other religious person.

There is, however, one instance in this passage in which it

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<sup>1</sup> We can see here one more instance in which the verb "seem" is used for ironic comments; see 3.3.2

can be said that Russel is using echoic irony, and that is when he says that "there is a grave objection which troubled St. Augustine...". Here it appears that the objection was grave for St. Augustine but not for Russell, in which case it can be interpreted as an echoic mention of St. Augustine's words, which are thought to be ridiculous by Russell.

Another example, which I believe to be in favour of the argument set forward in Hypothesis n° 4 , showing that all cases of irony are not echoic, is the following (taken from the Video episodes "Yes, Minister"):

3-

Humphrey: Do sit down Bernard. Ministers come, and Ministers go... It is our duty to fight for the Department's money despite his own panic reaction.

Bernard: But, I mean, how can he overcome panic?

Humphrey: Politicians like to panic. They need activity. It's their substitute for achievement.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: *The Economy Drive*)

Humphrey's last remark is pungent and ironic, though, again, it does not seem to be echoing anybody's thought or comment. He is only trying to say that Ministers never achieve anything, and he is looking down on them as idiots that have to find something to be occupied with (panic in this case), considering they never do anything important. Humphrey's remark is ironic here by presenting the absurdity of being busy with an "activity" like panic, which, in fact, can not be considered an activity for a Minister, and consequently serves his mocking intentions. He is ridiculing the Minister with his (Humphrey's) own words and

thoughts; he is not repeating or echoing any utterance or thought previously produced by the Minister. In no part of the episode is it shown or even suggested that the Minister says or thinks himself that "panic is his substitute for achievement"; on the contrary, Hacker thinks he is doing well and that he is going to change the old bureaucratic structure of the government with his revolutionary ideas. Humphrey, thus, is using his own pungent thought to be ironic, and he attains his goal considerably well without echoing anybody. A foreseen counter argument by a supporter of echoic interpretation theory could be that in this case (as well as in all the counterexamples presented here) the speaker (Humphrey in this example) is echoing his own thoughts. But such a reasoning would imply that every possible utterance is echoic and ironic, an implication that sheds no light on the further exploration of the phenomenon of irony. I, thus, consider it necessary to try to make a more profound analysis of verbal irony by taking into account other possibilities for its realisation. I firmly believe that echoic mention or interpretation is only one more of the strategies that a speaker/writer has at his disposal to convey irony, as was shown to be the case with "using the opposite proposition" (see 2.4.2) and as will be argued in chapter 8.

After the above analysis, it seems reasonable to suggest that the examples presented here display evidence in favour of Research Hypothesis n°4, which claims that not all ironic utterances are instances of echoic mention or interpretation. An account of all the cases of non-echoic irony found in the



corpus will be made in chapter 7, in order to observe their frequency of occurrence as compared to echoic cases.

#### 4.3.1.2 Does verbal irony always convey a derogatory attitude?

Another point that can be argued in Sperber & Wilson's approach to the subject of irony is their claim about the derogatory attitude which is always conveyed by irony. It is true that irony is a mode of expression that tends to convey ridicule, and that it is principally used as a device for criticism, but in the present piece of research I have found cases in which irony can convey praise and, even more, I have also found examples in which irony conveys neither criticism nor praise. This last finding could be proof against Sperber and Wilson's argument on the attitudinal character of irony. Instances have been found of verbal irony that seem to express no particular attitude towards any other person, thought or comment.

The use of irony with the intention of praising someone's thoughts, ideas or possessions will be analysed more carefully with respect to Politeness Theory in the next chapter (n°5). In this section, I shall proceed to analyse and discuss only some examples which I believe to be part of the evidence that will be in favour of Derived Hypothesis n°5 ("Not all ironic utterances convey a derogatory attitude"):

1- The following is a passage from a speech delivered by the

chairman of a testimonial dinner in honour of Mr. Frank Faulkner. It is included in King and Crerar's *Choice of Words* (1969) as an example of the use of verbal irony to convey praise. (F. Faulkner had never been late, never extended a lunch hour beyond its sixty minutes and never missed a day's work):

<<But, ladies and gentlemen, the one thing about Frank Faulkner everyone remembers with concern is his incorrigible wayward character. When Frank left for lunch, no one could be sure whether he'd return fifty one or fifty minutes later. His night-time excursions, we have sadly concluded, must have extended well into the early morning. Who cannot testify to having seen him in these halls even before the day's work had begun?. Had he in fact been home, you might ask? Under oath, his wife has testified before our board that he lived here.>>

(1969: 117)

2- Haverkate (1988) gives two characteristic examples in which the negative meaning which is literally specified implies a positive attitude of the speaker toward the state of affairs described:

a) "Oh, how small you have grown!"

b) "I don't like you at all!"

a) would sound quite normal if uttered by an adult addressing a child, and b) could be an ironic statement made in a conversation between two lovers.

This type of irony seems to occur with a low rate of frequency if we compare it to derogatory irony (quantitative results taken out of the corpus will be given in chapter 7); however, a low frequency of occurrence does not grant the researcher reasons to disregard it. Nevertheless, most of the

authors writing about irony seem to disregard this possibility in spite of the fact that it was seen and considered by Cicero as early as one century before Christ (see 2.2). There are only a few modern researchers who take "praising irony" into account, like Haverkate (1988) or Holdcroft (1983) who, in his article *Irony as Trope, and Irony as Discourse*, acknowledges that "irony can be playful and affectionate, as well as wounding" (1983: 496). Jerzy Pelc, in *Studies in Functional Logical Semiotics of Natural Language* (1971), writes about this type of irony, but he calls it "anti-irony", defining it as "an approval which has the appearance of a criticism" (1971: 169). But the fact of calling it "anti-irony" lets the reader infer that he does not consider it a kind of irony but, rather, something opposite to it. The approach taken in this work disagrees with Pelc and takes "praising irony" as a type of irony, since I believe it to display basically the same phenomenon.

It was stated above that ,much to my surprise, in my investigation of ironic language, I have come across some instances of verbal irony in which the intention is neither to criticize nor to praise. One such example has already been quoted in 2.4. I refer to Pascal's letter, in which he apologises for writing it "longer than usual because he didn't have the time to make it shorter". It seems to be clear that here Pascal is neither criticising nor praising anybody. Nor is he showing any special attitude to anybody or making any kind of evaluation. This example, then, makes us reflect upon the validity of the generally accepted belief (among irony

specialists) that evaluation is implicit in the nature of an ironical utterance. My reflection is that, perhaps, the very essence of irony is to be found in contradiction and paradox, more than in echoic mention, criticism, praise or any kind of evaluation. All these elements can also form part or be components of verbal irony, but they are not essential, nor are they necessary or sufficient conditions for its happy realisation. Another example of this "neutral" kind of irony can be found in a quotation of W.H. Auden that Booth makes in *A Rhetoric of Irony*:

<<We are all here on earth to help each other, but what the others are here for, God only knows.>> (1974: 1)

Again, it cannot be said that there is any kind of evaluative criticism or praise in Auden's remark. The irony lies in the paradoxical nature of the utterance, which brings out the supplementary humour of it.

Thus, it seems to be the case that the only characteristic that is stable and present in all cases of irony analysed so far is contradiction and paradox, which is not, of course, the same as to speak of "opposite propositions". This contradiction may be present at different levels, as has been partially shown in 3.6.. I would dare to add that the kind of contradiction involved in verbal irony always has a witty character, i.e., it implies a witty speaker/writer. Wit is considered to be one of the highest forms of humour, and that is why verbal irony is so much related to humour (as will be shown in 4.7). Being witty entails playing with ideas. I will adopt William Hazlitt's

(quoted in Morreall (1983)) definition of wit so as not to be vague in my attempt to characterise irony. Hazlitt's definition is the following: "An arbitrary juxtaposition of dissonant ideas, for some lively purpose of assimilation or contrast, generally of both". As Morreall points out, "the witty comment will often consist of an amusing comparison of two things that normally would not be thought of as similar" (1983: 72). Thus, I believe that the connection between irony and wit is self-evident.

From the above considerations, and from the standpoint of the ironic speaker's intentions it may be stated that there are three main kinds of verbal irony, namely,

- 1- "Derogatory" irony
- 2- "Praising" irony
- 3- "Neutral" irony

The name of the first two kinds will be changed later (chapter 5) to "Negative" and "Positive" irony, and will be explained in due course in connection with Politeness Theory (chapter 5) and with the view taken in this study for the definition of verbal irony and the taxonomy proposed (chapter 8).

Having discussed Sperber & Wilson's view of verbal irony, and having thus found evidence to support hypotheses 4 and 5, we now turn our attention to another of the theories named at the beginning of this chapter.

#### 4.4 Pretence Theory of Irony

Herbert Clark and Richard Gerrig (1984) proposed a Pretence

Theory of irony based on suggestions by Grice and Fowler. They claim that Sperber & Wilson have not correctly interpreted Grice in what he wanted to say about irony. They subsequently argue that Grice's theory assumes that the ironist is *pretending* to use one proposition in order to get across its contradictory one, rather than *using* that proposition. Thus Clark and Gerrig expand Grice's remarks on irony into a Pretence Theory of irony and argue for its superiority to the Mention Theory, describing its advantages for a psychological account of the functions and processes of irony.

Pretence Theory appeals to the etymology of the word irony, which, as was noted in chapter 2, comes from Greek *eironeia*, meaning "dissembling, ignorance purposely affected". According to Clark and Gerrig, Grice echoed the Hellenic account in the following remark: "To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests) and while one wants the pretence to be recognised as such, to announce it as a pretence would spoil the effect" (1978:125).

Clark and Gerrig complete Grice's treatment of irony as a kind of pretence with Fowler's explanation of what the ironist is pretending to do:

<<Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and the outsiders' incomprehension. It may be defined as the use of words intended to convey one meaning to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated, the delight of it lying in the secret intimacy set up between the latter and the speaker.>>

(1965: 305-6)

The Pretence Theory is therefore expressed by its authors as follows:

<<Suppose S is speaking to A, the primary addressee, and to A', who may be present or absent, real or imaginary. In speaking ironically, S is pretending to be S' speaking to A. What S' is saying is, in one way or another, patently unformed or injudicious, worthy of a "hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt" (Grice, 1978: 124). A' in ignorance, is intended to miss this pretence, to take S as speaking sincerely. But A, as part of the "inner circle" (to use Fowler's phrase), is intended to see everything -the pretence, S's injudiciousness, A's ignorance, and hence S's attitude toward S', A', and what S' said. S' and A' may be recognizable individuals (like the TV weather forecaster) or people of recognizable types (like opportunistic politicians).>>

(1984: 122)

In Clark and Gerrig's view, the Pretence Theory provides transparent explanations for important features of irony previously mentioned by Sperber and Wilson, such as a) asymmetry of affect, b) victims of irony, and c) ironic tone of voice. As regards a), Clark and Gerrig point out that people tend to see the world according to norms of success and excellence, and people in ignorance should cling especially tightly to these norms. This is just the sort of person ironists pretend to be, because they are more likely to make positive pretences, such as "What a clever idea", than negative ones, such as "What a stupid idea" (1984: 122). In relation to b), Clark and Gerrig agree with Sperber and Wilson in that irony always has victims, which according to Pretence Theory should be of two kinds: S' (the unseeing or injudicious person the ironist is pretending to be) and A' (the uncomprehending audience not in the inner circle). These two types are not distinguished by the Mention Theory.

Finally, Clark and Gerrig claim that Pretence Theory can naturally account for the ironic tone of voice, since the ironist is like an actor pretending to be another person and, consequently, has to imitate the voice of his/her victim (S').

As with the other theories studied hitherto, I find some of the claims of Pretence Theory can be argued. That is why I shall now proceed to analyse them.

#### 4.4.1 Is irony always pretence?

After the above considerations about Pretence Theory, which purport to present a better solution to the problem than Mention Theory, I must say that at first sight there does not seem to be much difference between one theory and the other. There is not much difference between "echoing" someone's utterance and "pretending" to be that person by saying what s/he has said. All the examples presented in 4.3.1.1.1. as echoic could also be considered as cases of pretence: for instance, when, in example 2, Hacker says "my lips are sealed", we may consider that he is pretending to be Humphrey (who had previously uttered the same sentence) in order to mock him and take revenge. Or, in example 4, when one of the friends refers to Damian as "dear Damian", it could be considered that he is imitating or pretending to be any of the persons who love or like Damian. In the following conversational exchange between Rose, Dorothy and Sophia, we find an instance of irony which could also be labelled both as "pretence" and as "echoic":



Rose: I can't believe my mother is riding around on a smelly old bus, being harrassed, pushed around, possibly even mugged by hostile teenagers with bad haircuts.

Dorothy: Rose, listen to me. You're overreacting. Your mother is not a helpless child. She's an active, vital woman who can take care of herself.  
PHONE RINGS

Rose: I'll get that. (Rose answers)  
Hello. Yes. this is she. Oh, my Lord!

Dorothy: Rose, what is it?

Rose: (into phone) Yes, I understand. I'll be right there.  
(Rose hangs up and grabs her keys)

Dorothy: Rose, what's wrong?

Rose: That was the police.

Dorothy: Is it your mother? Is she alright?

Rose: She's fine. She's at the police station. They picked up my vital, active mother. She was lost and disoriented. What do you have to say to that?

(GG, 1991: 70-1)

When Rose refers to her mother as "vital and active", it can be said that she is "pretending" to be Dorothy in order to be ironic (showing how ridiculous Dorothy's previous comment was) and to show the irony of the situation, given the fact that her mother has been picked up by the police after finding her lost and disoriented. Again, it can be stated that Rose is, at the same time, "echoing" Dorothy's previous remark.

In spite of the fact that both echoing a person's utterance or idea and pretending to be that person seem to co-occur very often, examples have been found in the corpora of cases when they do not co-occur, i.e. sometimes the ironic speaker may be "echoing" but not pretending and some other times

s/he may be pretending but not "echoing", and in both instances s/he is using verbal irony, a fact that tells us something more about the phenomenon in question, namely that both echoing and pretending may be strategies used to convey ironic meanings, but that none of them is sufficient or complete in itself to describe all occurrences of the phenomenon. To illustrate, I shall present first, an example where the echoic utterance is echoic but where the writer does not seem to be pretending, and second, an example of the opposite situation, i.e., pretence but not echoic verbal irony

a)

<<Owing to their miraculous powers, priests (in the eleventh century) could determine whether a man should spend eternity in heaven or in hell. If he died while excommunicate, he went to hell; if he died after priests had performed all the proper ceremonies, he would ultimately go to heaven provided he had duly repented and confessed. Before going to heaven, however, he would have to spend some time -perhaps a very long time -suffering the pains of purgatory. Priests could shorten this time by saying masses for his soul, which they were willing to do for a suitable money payment.>>

(BR, 1958: 49)

Russell is here using echoic irony because he uses the priests' own words ("miraculous", for instance) to express his contempt for their ideas. By echoing their thoughts and the facts in the way his victims saw them, he is attacking them by trying to show his readers how absurd and unfair their views are to him. But in spite of ridiculing his victims by echoing their words and beliefs, he does not pretend to be any of his attacked victims. He does not need to do so, for the way in which he presents the

facts is enough to give an ironic effect: the reader readily understands that Russell does not think that priests in the 11th. century had miraculous powers. He only tells his readers about their beliefs and in doing so he introduces the opposition *spiritual/material* (one of the group of underlying oppositions found in this study as basic for the expression of verbal irony -see 7.3.1-) at the end, in such a way as to give the aggressive/negatively ironic effect of showing these priests' dishonesty.

b) An example of verbal irony in which the speaker decided to use pretence but did not need to echo anybody's utterance or idea is the following:

Rose: What's wrong with your heart?

Blanche: Oh, nothing. Dr Stein just thought it sounded a little -irregular. I think it's 'cause I was so uncomfortable sitting there topless with a strange man.

Dorothy: Next time, just pretend you're at home and he's the bug guy.

(GG, 1991: 175)

Dorothy is here being verbally ironic by using the strategy of "simulated advice" (see chapter 7). She is pretending to give her some advice but in fact she is criticising her once more for being so "easy" with men. This is also an example of speech act-oriented verbal irony (see 7.2.3), for the act intended is different from the act expressed. Although Dorothy is pretending, it cannot be said that she is echoing anybody's thoughts or ideas, for she is using a witty and pungent comment that cannot be traced backwards or forwards in the conversation

in any of the girls' utterances or ideas. It only seems to be what came up to her smart mind in that moment, with the intention to be aggressive towards Blanche, but with no intention of echoing hers or any other character's words.

Returning to Pretence Theory alone, I must say that, as with the other theories discussed in this work, I tried to test it by checking if it could be held for all the examples of verbal irony analysed in the corpora, and the outcome of this testing was similar to that of the other theories: not all the samples of ironic discourse seem to display acting or pretence on the part of the speaker (Research Hypothesis n° 6). Consider the examples analysed in 1 (3.6), in which the speaker means what she literally says but at the same time is ironical because she implies that her husband is not understanding and is consequently criticising him:

"I wish I had an understanding husband."

The point I want to make here is that the ironic speaker is not pretending to be anybody, nor is she echoing anybody's thought. She is just herself, being bitter at her husband and expressing a contradiction between what her husband is and what she would like him to be, conditions that, within the framework of the definition proposed later on in this work (see 7.3.1) seem to be necessary to make it ironic (the underlying semantic opposition here is *real vs. desired situation* -see 7.3.1).

Another example that seems to be in favour of Derived Hypothesis n° 6 could be Pascal's (quoted twice in this work; 2.4

and 3.1), when saying that he is making his letter long "only because he didn't have the time to make it shorter". There seems to be no pretence here. He is making an ironic (expressing a contradiction or paradox) and witty comment, without involving any other participant (implicit or explicit) in it. As there is no other participant implied, Pascal can not be pretending to be anybody. But even in the cases in which there are other participants and in which the speaker/writer's intention is to criticise, he may criticise without "pretending" as the following example from the corpus seems to suggest:

Humphrey: You came up with all the questions I hoped nobody would ask

Hacker: Well, Opposition is about asking awkward questions

Humphrey: And Government is about not answering them

Hacker: Well, you answered all mine, anyway.

Humphrey: I'm glad you thought so, Minister.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: "Open Government")

Humphrey's last statement is ironic. There is a "double meaning" in the verb "thought", which may lead to a twofold interpretation: 1) "I'm glad you thought so, because I really answered your questions"; or 2) "I'm glad you thought so, but you only "thought" so, because, in fact, I did not give you any reliable answer", i.e. "I cheated you". In saying so, Humphrey is not pretending to be Hacker; he is internally satisfied for having been able to cheat the Minister and stresses the word "thought" to show this fact to the audience. The tone used in

this utterance is tone III (divided), which, as will be discussed in chapter 6, seems to be frequently used in ironic utterances. The rising part of the tone on the word "Minister" suggests some "reservation" or "insinuation" on the part of Humphrey.

Nor can it be said here that Humphrey is echoing Hacker or any other person; the ironic interpretation in this example is basically conveyed by an implicit contrast between the verb "to think" and "to do", i.e.: it is as if Humphrey were thinking "This is what you thought, but it was not what I did".

I shall now turn to another of the arguments in Pretence theory that -from my point of view- can be refuted.

#### 4.4.2 Victims of irony

The second observation I would like to make upon this theory is that the two kinds of victims (S' and A') are not always present in all cases of irony. This is certainly true when verbal irony is used in a play or when in a given language exchange there is a third participant, but this is not always the case. Sometimes the two audiences are simply not expected, and the ironic remark is directly addressed to the hearer without intending to convey a second (or better, "third") meaning for another participant or audience. The only necessary thing in these cases to get the ironic effect across is that both speaker and hearer have a certain common ground of shared knowledge, and, in this way, the hearer will not be an "innocent" participant that "misses the pretence", and there will be no need for any

other kind of audience. Even more, it can be said that in some very specific cases, such as in Pascal's example, there is an audience, but there are no victims whatsoever. An example involving only one type of audience could be the following, in which a mother asks her daughter to bring her the paper and the daughter delays, so the mother says:

"Why don't you take your time and bring me the paper?"

We have seen examples similar to this one in 3.4, in which there is a contradiction in the speech act used and the one intended. The utterance seems to be a polite question, but it is, in fact, a command, equivalent to "Hurry up and bring me the paper". The mother is being ironic directly towards her daughter, and there is no other audience than the daughter, who will surely not be "innocent" about the mother's intended meaning.

#### 4.4.3 Ironic tone of voice

This is an interesting point to discuss about verbal irony. Some authors (not only Clark and Gerrig) have studied ironic intonation to try to find out whether a particular intonation is characteristic of irony and whether it is a necessary condition of it.

As it was observed that in the corpora studied the speakers made use of this "ironic tone of voice", I decided it would be worth devoting a chapter to the study of the phenomenon. For that reason, this issue will not be discussed here, and I invite the reader to refer to chapter 6, in which I present the results

of a survey carried out in order to study the relationship between irony and prosodic features.

#### 4.4.4 Final comments on the Pretence Theory of irony

Even though Pretence Theory seems to make sense in many respects, it can be concluded that, again, it does not paint the whole picture of irony. As was noted above, we can find examples in which the ironist is not pretending or acting in any way. In fact, one might argue that ironists are never acting, for they choose their conversation strategies in order to cause a particular effect on behalf of themselves and not of any other person or "victim".

The Pretence Theory of irony was counterattacked by Dan Sperber (1984), who argued that Clark and Gerrig had misinterpreted Mention Theory, and who tried to prove that "Pretence Theory might provide a plausible description of parody but that it fails to account for many types and many properties of irony proper" (1984: 130).

Finally, it should be remembered that Quintilian, as early as the first century A.D., had already considered pretence theories of irony, upon which he made the following reflection:

<<I have found some who speak of irony as *dissimulation*, but... this latter name does not cover the whole range of this figure.>>

(1st.c. A.D., ed. 1942: 99)



#### 4.5 Irony and Sarcasm

When analysing the phenomenon of irony, there comes a point in which we ask ourselves whether irony is the same as sarcasm or, if they differ, in what respect they differ from each other. Interestingly, the scholars who have studied the question do not seem to be able to reach an agreement.

Raymond Gibbs, in *On the Psycholinguistics of Sarcasm* (1986), states that irony and sarcasm are different things, though he acknowledges that both are very difficult to define. He illustrates the difference by saying that if a speaker says "you're a fine friend" to someone who has injured him in some way, the utterance is sarcastic. However, if a speaker says "They tell me you're a slow runner" to someone who has just won a marathon or race, the utterance is seen as ironic (1986:3). In spite of this differentiation he makes, he then seems to use both concepts indistinctly all through the article, which is not strange, since I believe it is very difficult to separate one concept from the other. In my view, what Gibbs refers to as "sarcasm" is what I shall later on (chapter 6) call "negative irony" (derogatory), and what he calls irony proper is what I shall call "positive irony" (praising). Sarcasm, then, seems to be better placed as a kind of irony, for it can be said that all examples of sarcasm are ironical, but not all instances of irony are sarcastic.

Geoffrey Numberg (1981) makes an even more curious distinction, for he says that what distinguishes irony from

sarcasm is that irony is ultimately directed at the speaker himself, whereas sarcasm is not. The view taken in this study cannot be in agreement with Numberg's, because the evidence of the pieces of ironic discourse found in the corpora studied herein tells us that a speaker can be sarcastic towards himself as well as towards others. Or is it not true that many times in life (when we make a mistake) we find ourselves saying "How clever of me" (in a critical way, meaning "how could I have been such a fool!").

Roger Kreuz and Sam Glucksberg consider sarcasm as "a form of verbal irony" (1989: 374) and quote *The Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* definition of sarcasm:

<<A sharp and often satirical or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain.>> (1988: 1043)

Muecke described sarcasm as "the crudest form of irony" (1980: 54). Holdcroft (1983: 495) and Leech (1980: 95) also assume that sarcasm is a type or a form of irony.

As with everything that has to do with irony, the different authors studying the phenomenon do not seem to be able to come to an agreement. Nash (1985) states that irony and sarcasm are different in that the sarcastic statement is ostensibly sincere, whereas the ironic one is not. So if somebody said "Tommy is lazy" it could be interpreted differently if the speaker's intention were sarcastic than if it were ironic: "Sarcastically, it might be said that Tommy doesn't strain himself; ironically, that Tommy is renowned for his labours" (1985: 152). In spite of this, Nash later on admits that there may be some doubt about

the assumption that the irony/sarcasm distinction is necessary and wholly valid, since both sarcasm and irony are counter-coded, and here is precisely where puzzling affinities can be seen between them.

Considering, then, that both sarcasm and irony cannot be seen as phenomena completely distinct from each other, I have thought it appropriate -on the basis of the analysis made in my research- to view sarcastic utterances as members of a subset of the universal set of ironic utterances, verbal irony being a much wider phenomenon than sarcasm. In this way, we would be able to say that all sarcastic utterances are ironic, but not all ironic utterances are sarcastic. Thus, being sarcastic (i.e. "negatively ironic" as will be better explained in chapter 5) will represent only one more of the possible strategies the ironic speaker/writer has at his/her disposal.

Therefore, the study of irony done in this work finds it more sensible to agree with Holdcroft (1983), Leech (1980), Muecke (1980) and Kreuz & Glucksberg (1989) in their consideration of sarcasm as a kind of irony, but there is a point in Kreuz and Glucksberg's article with which I can not agree, for it appears to be in contradiction with their own definition of sarcasm. They state that "people can use verbal irony without being sarcastic", an example of which would be to say: "Another gorgeous day" when it has been raining for 15 days (1989: 374), which sounds reasonable; but they also say that "people can be sarcastic without being ironic", and here is where I believe they contradict themselves. If sarcasm is a *kind* of irony, it can

never be set apart from it. The example they give is not convincing either, for they state a person can be sarcastic without being ironic when saying "Thanks a lot" to a person who has obviously been unhelpful to him, and this, we know, is one of the clear examples of irony given by Haverkate in his typology of irony based on Searle's typology of Speech Acts (as was shown in 3.6.1).

Katherina Barbe's concluding remark on the distinction between irony and sarcasm is in agreement with the position adopted in this study:

<<I conclude that sarcasm has a place under the heading irony... What makes it sarcasm however, is that the interpretation of the ironic utterance has to be ironic-sarcastic, it is thus somewhat stable. Speakers cannot later say I did not mean it in an attempt to save face because sarcasm leaves no room for guessing or doubting, for the so-called benefit of the doubt, which may be found in other non sarcastic instances of irony. Sarcasm still accords the hearers to save face. If they do not agree with the speaker, they do not need to reply and they can ignore the utterance. Direct criticism, on the other hand, would force a reply. In this case we can consider sarcasm a potentially face-threatening and attacking criticism which forces an ironic interpretation.>> (1995: 29)

If sarcasm is a type of irony, we infer that, in semantic terms, there is a hyponymic relationship between the two concepts, in which irony is the superordinate and sarcasm is a hyponym of it, in which case all instances of sarcasm are ironic.

We shall now enlarge our discussion of the aforementioned paper by Kreuz and Glucksberg, for the time has come to discuss the last of the psycholinguistic theories of irony proposed for analysis at the beginning of this chapter, namely, the Echoic Reminder Theory.

#### 4.6 The Echoic Reminder Theory

R. Kreuz and S. Glucksberg (1989) base their theory on the following premises:

- "An ironic or sarcastic remark is a comment that is used to communicate the speaker's attitude toward an event or state of affairs such as disappointment with the weather itself or ridicule of a weather forecast that had gone sadly awry" (1989: 375);
- the ironic expression can remind a listener of what might have been expected and hoped for or of that inaccurate prediction;
- Sperber & Wilson were right in their appreciation of irony as an echoic interpretation, but Kreuz and Glucksberg propose to call this account *Echoic Reminder Theory* because: a) this term highlights the reminder function of echoic utterances, and b) <<although all ironic utterances accomplish their communicative intent by reminding listeners of some antecedent event, not all such reminders are "echoic".>> (1989: 375);
- echoic interpretation is then a special case of reminders in general : allusions to prior occurrences or states of affairs.

As can be deduced from these premises, Echoic Reminder Theory is very close to Sperber & Wilson's Echoic Interpretation Theory. There is much common ground between the two theories, with the only difference that, according to Kreuz and Glucksberg, the Echoic Reminder Theory covers a wider number of ironic utterances, for echoic utterances are simply one special kind of

reminder. Then there could be cases of ironic utterances which are reminders but not echoic. In this respect, Kreuz and Glucksberg seem to be right, for I have found several instances of verbal irony in the corpus which are "reminders" of some idea, thought, person or situation but that could not be labelled as "echoic". Consider the following comment by Bertrand Russell:

[1]

<<If you wish to persuade people that because Adam ate an apple, all who have never heard of this interesting occurrence will be roasted in an everlasting fire by a benevolent Deity, you must catch them young, make them stupid by means of drink or drugs, and carefully isolate them from all contact with books or companions capable of making them think.>>

(BR, 1958: 58)

This passage is rich in terms of ironic interpretation: on the one hand, the adjectives "interesting" and "benevolent" are ironic in the traditional sense: they convey "the opposite"; Russell wants to say that Adam and the apple were not interesting occurrences at all, and that the Deity can not be benevolent if it will roast any person in an everlasting fire (which constitutes, in itself, an ironical situation). On the other hand, all the passage is ironic because it is reminiscent of some religious ideas which Russell is obviously criticising. Thus, this comment reminds us of these ideas but is not "echoing" them in the strict sense of the word. To echo would be to repeat the same ideas in some way or another, but Russell is not repeating what religious people say or think; he is being bitterly sarcastic by giving a "recipe" for persuading people of some religious belief, this recipe being "making them stupid by means

of drinks or drugs and making them incapable of thinking". He is trying to remind the readers of some errors that -according to his view- religion has committed, and of religious ideas that are ridiculous as far as he can judge. As noted above, thus, instances of "reminding", though not "echoic" irony, can be found.

In the same way as with Sperber and Wilson's Theory, the approach of this investigation views the Echoic Reminder Theory as showing one aspect or one of the possible strategies of irony, but not all of them. Echoic Reminder Theory insists on derogatory irony and states that "victimless irony is difficult, if not impossible to interpret" (1989: 377). We have already seen how irony can be sometimes clearly victimless (4.4.2), a view that is held by serious scholars who have devoted their lives to the study of irony, such as Enright or Muecke.

On the other hand, in the same way that it is not always necessary for an ironic utterance to be echoic, the evidence of many examples shows that, in some cases, it is not necessary either for it to remind the listener of anything "that might have been expected or hoped for". Consider the following exchange in a trial, in which the lawyer is being ironic as to the anxiety of the accused over his grandmother's signing of the will:

[2]

a	11	^was she in lbed on the 'twenty-'fourth of	/
a	11	J/anuary# - - -	/
b	11	[@:m] - - - ^n\o# - -	/
a	11	((cos)) ^when she was !\in b/ed#	/
a	11	she'd ^got [dhi:] . :tray or a !b\ook#	/

a	11	as a ^b\ack'ground#	/
a	11	^h\adn't she#	/
b	11	^y/es#	/
a	11	and ^you I im/agine#	/
a	11	were ^most 'anxious that she was lc\omfortable#	/
a	11	be^fore 'letting her :s\ign the 'document# - - -	/

(LLC, S.11.1)

The irony of the prosecutor does not seem to be reminding anyone of any expectation or hope. He is just attacking the accused by letting the hearers infer that this anxiety for the grandmother to be comfortable was not so much so for her comfort as for her signing the will. The ironic strategy here (as in many other instances) seems to be of a much more delicate sort than simply the "reminding of any thought, idea or comment". Surely this could be easily argued against by Echoic Reminder Theory supporters by saying that the prosecutor's ironic comment could be reminiscent of some other similar comment or idea expressed by any person at any given time, but then this theory would be too general, and again, as is the case with Echoic Mention and Interpretation Theories, any utterance could be labelled as ironic, and the fact of being a reminding utterance would not be a revealing fact for analytical purposes.

Before getting into the analysis of humour within irony, I would like to conclude that all the psycholinguistic theories we have been analysing present a true aspect or feature of irony. Nevertheless, they all seem to fail in embracing all possible cases. As was stated in chapters 2 and 3, if we look at the phenomenon with the concept of "strategy" in mind, we can well see that these particular aspects pointed out by the different



theories are but particular strategies that a speaker can use to be ironic; i.e., a speaker can echo a previous utterance and be ironic, s/he can choose to "pretend" s/he is being another person to express irony, or s/he can appeal to the hearer's remembering some kind of thought or comment to understand the irony of his/her (the speaker's) utterance. S/he may as well do all these things at the same time or none of them and be ironic all the same. For we also conclude that the very essence of irony seems to lie in *implied contradiction*, which can be present at any level and which is expressed through a varied number of strategies.

Finally, and as a summary and illustration, I present a chart with the main theories of verbal irony (and their arguments) discussed hitherto (chart 4.1).

CHART 4.1: THEORIES OF VERBAL IRONY DISCUSSED HITHERTO

THEORY	AUTHOR(S)	ARGUMENTS/MAIN IDEAS
1-CLASSICAL/TRADITIONAL	Socrates, Cicero, Quintilian, Samuel Johnson (and many modern authors)	* irony as "trope" or "figure" of speech * the utterance means the opposite of its literal meaning (opposite of the proposition)
2- THEORY OF IMPLICATURE	Paul Grice	* the ironic speaker violates one of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle, i.e., the Quality Maxim, and, thus, he is being insincere. * the listener understands the irony through implicature after rejecting the literal meaning
3- THEORY OF SPEECH ACTS	Austin, Searle, Haverkate, etc.	* indirect speech acts can sometimes convey irony * irony can result from an opposition of speech acts
4- ECHOIC MENTION THEORY	Sperber & Wilson	* all cases of irony are instances of echoic <u>mention</u> of some previous utterance
5- ECHOIC INTERPRETATION/ RELEVANCE THEORY	Sperber & Wilson	* all cases of irony are instances of echoic <u>interpretation</u> of some previous thought, idea or utterance
6- PRETENCE THEORY	Clark & Gerrig	* the ironist is <u>pretending</u> to use one proposition in order to get across its contradictory one
7- ECHOIC REMINDER THEORY	Kreuz & Glucksberg	* ironic expressions <u>remind</u> the listener of some previous thought, comment, expectation or hope

I now turn to another of the psychological aspects of irony, namely, the fact that irony can be humorous and that then, humour can be one of the intended meanings of it , as well as an aim or purpose in itself.

#### 4.7 Irony and Humour

Verbal irony is very much related to humour. The contradiction or clash expressed by it, and sometimes the witty kind of aggression or praise that it conveys, gives a comic or humorous effect to it. It generally elicits the external or "internal" laugh of some of the participants. In cases of sarcasm (aggressive irony), the victim of the criticism does not generally laugh, but if there is an audience or if the words said by the ironist are later on told to a third person, most surely these words will make the audience or third participant laugh.

In conversation, we many times tend to play. Language becomes a game and joking through sarcasm (and irony in general) is part of that game.

Neal Norrick (1994) analyses conversational joking and states that "it is associated with aggression but also with rapport, and with disrupting conversation but also with intensifying cohesion" (1994: 409). He includes sarcasm within conversational joking and points out that sarcasm can also enhance rapport by excluding others. Though sarcasm and mocking seem to signal negative effect, Norrick acknowledges that "even these aggressive forms of joking reframe the interaction as play

like the other joking strategies, so they end up conveying solidarity and modulating involvement, especially among conversationalists who maintain a customary joking relationship" (1994: 409). Indeed, if we analyse the relationship existing among people who are generally ironic and sarcastic towards one another, in many instances it will be found that they are close friends, husband and wife, or that they bear some other kind of close relationship. This will be analysed in more detail in chapter 5, in which irony will be studied in the scope of Politeness Theory.

According to some psychologists, there is a connection between humour and memory. Stephen Schmidt (1994) concluded (after a cognitive experiment in which memory for humorous and non-humorous versions of sentences was compared) that humorous sentences were better remembered than non-humorous ones. Maybe this is one of the subconscious reasons for using irony (which is generally humorous): we want to go deep in the hearer's or audience's mind so as to leave our "seal" on it.

The use of irony as a humorous device has then much to do with deep human psychological motifs. I believe that the understanding of these psychological motifs can lead us to a better comprehension of the whole phenomenon, and that is why it will be very useful to introduce Freud's theory of jokes, as he developed it in his well-known paper *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (first published in 1905. The edition that will be referred to here is the 1991 Penguin one). But before scrutinising Freud's reflections on jokes and humour, I will

present briefly some of the theories and ideas about "laughter" that different scholars have put forward. I consider this appropriate given the fact that laughter is a feature that very frequently accompanies irony, and this occurs to such an extent that I have had to consider it as one of the variables in my study of the prosodic features of irony (see chapter 6).

#### 4.7.1. Theories of laughter

In his book entitled *Taking Laughter Seriously* (1983), John Morreal presents four theories of laughter: three traditional ones and his own. He notes that, unlike other pieces of physiological behaviour like yawning or coughing, laughter is connected with emotions, and that is why it is difficult to find a comprehensive theory that accounts for all cases of laughter (the same can be said of irony, as I have discussed).

The oldest of the theories -though probably the most widespread one- is "The Superiority Theory", which holds the hypothesis that laughter is an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people. Plato was one of the first supporters of this theory, for he thought that laughter involved a certain "malice" or "a pain in the soul". Laughter, then, according to this theory, is basically a form of derision and something that people use to look down on others. One of the steps in the evolution of modern laughter was the development of ridicule. Indeed, in cultures like that of Samoa for instance, cruel laughter and the laugh of ridicule seem to be the dominant

kinds of laughter.

The second theory discussed by Morreall is "The Incongruity Theory". For the supporters of this theory, amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical or inappropriate. The basic idea behind this theory is that we live in an orderly world, where we have come to expect certain patterns among things, their properties, events, etc.; and so we laugh when we experience something that does not fit into these patterns. The most famous proponents of this theory were Kant and Shopenhauer (18th and 19th centuries).

In both the Superiority and Incongruity theories, there is a certain duality or contrast that triggers laughter.

The third of the theories of laughter, "The Relief Theory", has a physiological point of view in which laughter is seen as a venting of nervous energy. This theory was supported by Freud (among other authors), as we shall see in the next point of this chapter. Laughing, within this theory, would be analogous to the opening of a safety valve in a steam pipe: in the same way that the opening of the valve releases excess steam pressure built up within the pipe, laughter is supposed to release excess nervous energy built up within the laugher's nervous system (Morreall, 1983:26).

The fourth and last of these theories is the one supported by Morreall himself. He observes that each of the above theories embrace one aspect of laughter but not all the possible ones, and, so, he puts forward his theory by saying that "laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift"

(1883: 39). By giving this general definition he attempts to cover all cases of laughter, even the laughter caused by tickling.

Much could be said about each of the theories presented above, but for the purposes of this piece of research, it is enough to analyse them only a bit in order to find their connection to irony. If we look at the claims made by each theory, we shall see that all of them account for cases of laughter which could be elicited after an instance of verbal irony: the words "derision" and "ridicule" used to explain the first of the theories are self-evident for cases of sarcasm or "aggressive irony". The name of the second theory, "incongruity", also recalls the contradictory essence of irony. "The Relief Theory" will be analysed more profoundly in relation to Freud's view of humour and jokes, but for the time being, let me say only that, many times, verbal irony serves the speaker as an escape for his repressed feelings towards a given person or situation. Finally, as regards Morreall's "New Theory", I think that most instances of irony constitute a "pleasant psychological shift" and that is the reason why they make us laugh.

Therefore, the narrow relationship existing between irony and laughter can not be denied. We shall now look into a more complex and intricate psychological theory of humour, namely Freud's theory of jokes.

## 4.7.2 Sigmund Freud's interpretation of jokes

### 4.7.2.1 Causes and purposes of jokes

Sigmund Freud makes a thorough analysis of jokes, after which he concludes that "joking is an activity which aims at deriving pleasure from mental processes, whether intellectual or otherwise" (1905: 139). He writes about two main kinds of jokes, namely, *innocent* jokes and *tendentious* jokes. He asserts that *tendentious* jokes are those in which there is either hostile or sexual aggressiveness and that they generally call for three people: the one who makes the joke, the one taken as the object of the aggression, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled (1905: 143). Freud points out that in these cases, it is not the person who makes the joke who laughs at it and who, therefore, enjoys its pleasurable effect, but the inactive listener.

Sarcastic jokes would then be included within *tendentious* jokes, and the purposes and causes of the latter would be the same as those of the former.

The psychological explanation that Freud gives for jokes is traced back to the "childhood" of human civilisation and to our individual childhood. He explains that ever since the childhood of civilisation, hostile impulses against our fellow men have been subject to the same restrictions and progressive repression as our sexual urges. And so it is that we have made some advances in the control of our hostile impulses. To illustrate



this fact, he quotes Lichtenberg, who put it in drastic terms:

<<Where we now say "Excuse me!", we used to give a box in the ears.>>

(1905: 146)

This brutal hostility, now forbidden by law, has been replaced by verbal *invective*, and so it is that by making (through jokes) our enemy very small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve the pleasure of overcoming him/her, and a third person can, therefore, bear witness by his/her laughter. In this part of his analysis of jokes, Freud does not speak in particular about irony, but it can be clearly inferred that this is applicable to a great part of ironic jokes, namely, sarcastic or aggressive ones. Freud explains the part played by jokes in hostile aggressiveness in the following way:

<<A joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously; once again, then, the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible. It will further bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us without any very close investigation just as on other occasions we ourselves have often been bribed by an innocent joke into overestimating the substance of a statement expressed jokingly.>>

(1905: 147)

In agreement with this view, irony can be seen as one of the "refinements" of civilization, and maybe this is why many authors and people in general associate irony with cleverness or intelligence. If a person is clever and "civilised", s/he will try to express his/her aggressiveness in an elegant way, and not start "punching other people on their nose".

Freud also remarks that another of the purposes of

tendentious jokes may sometimes be to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke represents a rebellion against that authority and a liberation from its pressure (1905: 149). After reading this, a recalling of the purposes of irony in many cases cannot be helped. If we remember the examples of irony taken from the series "Yes, Minister" that have been analysed, we shall conclude that most of them illustrate this purpose: the use of irony (which is humorous to the audience) makes it possible for Humphrey (the Minister's Secretary) to criticise the Minister, who is in a position of authority in relation to him. All this has to do with the sociological variable of *power*, which is considered by Brown and Levinson in their *Theory of Politeness* and which will be more closely analysed with respect to irony in the next chapter. But it is important for us to see Freud as an antecedent to these ideas, which were later on inspected from a sociolinguistic perspective.

#### 4.7.2.2 Irony in Freud's view

In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud makes only two allusions to irony. The first one is in relation to "the techniques of jokes". One of the techniques of jokes is, according to Freud, "representation by the opposite", a technique which "is used frequently and works powerfully" (1905: 113). He also notes that this technique is by no means peculiar to jokes. It is also a characteristic of irony. Thus, Freud views irony

in a very restricted light, which reminds us of the classical and traditional approaches studied in chapter 2. His exact words are the following:

<<The only technique that characterizes irony is representation by opposite.>>  
(1905: 113)

However, the entire book is full of ironic jokes which, for the most part, are not considered by him to be ironic, but that clearly show irony working through strategies other than "representation by opposite".

As has been argued, his explanation of the causes and purposes of jokes can very well fit in for many instances of verbal irony, and, as we shall hereafter see, there is still much more in his theory of jokes that can perfectly well be applied to and related to irony. Later on, in his second allusion to irony, Freud recognizes irony as a subspecies of the comic:

<<A person who tries to bring the joke-work into operation in himself as deliberately as possible - a professional wag- soon discovers as a rule that the easiest way of replying to an assertion by a joke is by asserting its contrary and by leaving it to the inspiration of the moment to get rid of the objection which his contradiction is likely to provoke, by giving what he has said a fresh interpretation. It may be that the representation by the opposite owes the favour it enjoys to the fact that it forms the core of another pleasurable way of expressing a thought, which can be understood without any need for bringing in the unconscious. I am thinking of irony, which comes very close to joking and is counted among the sub-species of the comic... It produces comic pleasure in the hearer, probably because it stirs him into a contradictory expenditure of energy which is at once recognized as being unnecessary.>>  
(1991: 232).

4.7.2.3 Freud's theory of jokes and how it can be related to some psycholinguistic theories of irony previously analysed in this chapter

All through Freud's paper about jokes, we can find elements that remind us of the psycholinguistic theories of irony we have been analysing. When speaking about "the purposes of jokes", for instance, Freud states that "joke-techniques are partly governed by a tendency towards economy. Given that in the case of tendentious jokes much pleasure is obtained, it is therefore plausible to suppose that this yield of pleasure corresponds to the physical expenditure that is saved" (1905: 167). I believe a recalling of Relevance Theory is unavoidable here, particularly in its claim that an assumption is more relevant if it has the greatest contextual effects requiring the smallest processing effort (1986: 125). In the case of irony, the speaker is trying to be more relevant, and the ironic remark is the way he finds of producing the desired contextual effects by trying to economise in effort. This is also what happens with jokes, Freud explains, and I understand this also holds for ironic jokes.

Another of the elements that can be found in irony, and which -as we have seen- is defended by Pretence Theory, is *mimicry*. Freud makes an allusion to it when he explains that mimicry is one of the sources of comic pleasure, and that it "gives quite extraordinary pleasure to the hearer and makes its object comic even if it is still far from the exaggeration of a caricature" (1905: 261).

When analysing the genesis of jokes, Freud states that some

jokes give us pleasure because they make us rediscover something which is familiar to us; they make us remember. There is a close connection between recognising and remembering; so, according to Freud, there is also a pleasure in remembering (1905: 171). And this, needless to say, reminds us of the Echoic Reminder Theory seen in 4.6.

It seems, then, that many of the elements which are present in jokes are also present in irony: economy of effort, pretence, remembering. And I would like to add that in the same way that each of these elements does not define jokes in their totality, neither does each of them define irony on the whole. They can be present in many instances of ironic utterances but each element is not enough if we want to get into the essentials for a good definition of irony.

I would venture to say that all the examples of irony analysed in the course of this investigation are humorous in some way or another. In both *"Yes, Minister"* and *The Golden Girls* the irony is intended to make the audience laugh, given their characteristics as television comedy programmes. But even in Bertrand Russell's examples, which show a serious criticism of society, religion and other human matters, it cannot be denied that at least a very special kind of "inner" laugh is caused in the reader, who is supposed to be his "accomplice". Many instances of humorous irony have also been found in the corpus of journalistic writing used in this investigation.

To present just one more very humorous example, let us find the "pleasure" of the following sarcastic remark uttered by

Dorothy, as a criticism to Blanche's desire to be "for ever young":

[1]

Dorothy: Now what are you doing?

Blanche: Taking my bee pollen, my sheep liver extract, and my fish oil protein. I'm getting years younger with each passing day.

Dorothy: Fine, Blanche. When they defrost Walt Disney he'll have someone to go out with.

(GG, 1991: 67)

#### 4.7.2.4 The techniques of jokes

Freud analyses a considerable number of jokes (many of which are clearly ironical) and finds different joke-techniques, which are summarised as follows:

##### I) Condensation

- a) with formation of composite word
- b) with modification

##### II) Multiple use of the same material

- c) as a whole and in parts
- d) in a different order
- e) with slight modification
- f) of the same words full and empty

##### III) Double meaning

- g) meaning as a name and as a thing
- h) metaphorical and literal meanings
- i) double meaning proper (play upon words)
- j) double entendre
- k) double meaning with allusion

(1905: 76-7)

I am not going to deal with each of the techniques here, but after all that has been said about irony, it is not difficult to see that many of these techniques are also techniques or

strategies used in ironic speech. "Double meaning" is the most transparent one. Within "double meaning", the use of puns or plays upon words is one of the techniques which I have found to be rather common among ironic strategies. An example could be the following, given by W. H. Ballin (1990) (quoting a theatre critic), in which there is a play upon two common meanings of, precisely, the word *play*:

<<The Finchley Dramatic Society played Shakespeare last night. Shakespeare lost.>>

(1990: 7)

By associating the meaning of "play" for competitive games with its meaning for "performing" or "acting", the theatre critic is being ironic and humorous because his intention is ultimately to say that the performance left much to be desired.

The analysis of ironic "double meaning" could also be viewed from and associated with the standpoint of Minsky's *Frame-theory* (1975), a computational and psychological approach to discourse understanding. Frame theory is basically an attempt to provide conventional or stereotypic representations of knowledge of the world as an explanation for the interpretation of discourse. Basic to Minsky's theory is the claim that our knowledge is stored in memory in the form of data structures which he calls "frames" and which represent stereotyped situations. Thus, when we encounter a new situation, we select from our memory a structure called "frame", which is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit the reality of the particular situation. The example of the theatre play given above could then be interpreted as a situation that calls for the retrieving of two mental

"frames": 1) the frame of "competitive games", where the verb "play" fills a particular "slot", and 2) the frame of "theatre performances", in which the verb "play" fills another kind of "slot" (different from that in 1).

Related to Minsky's *Frames* are Schank & Abelson's *Scripts* (1977), Sanford & Garrod's *Scenarios* (1981), Anderson's *Schemata* (1977) and Johnson-Laird *Mental Models* (1980). All of these are proposals for dealing with the organisation of knowledge in memory and show ways to store such knowlege.

As can be noted, Freud's early techniques of jokes can now be re-examined in the light of more modern psychological approaches and theories. I shall refer to more of these techniques in the future development of this work, for as has already been noted, the strategies or techniques used by the ironist are a central concern of this investigation. A typology of ironic strategies will be presented in chapter 8, within which the techniques anticipated by Freud will be reflected.

#### 4.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have tried to approach the phenomenon of irony from a psychological and psycholinguistic perspective, which I understand to be very important given the great connection between language and mind and, especially, between irony and mental strategies. I have tried to discuss the main principles of the most well-known psycholinguistic theories of irony, and I have come to the conclusion that all of them show



a certain aspect of the phenomenon, but none of them can be said to describe it totally. However, it can be said that they have helped us understand that irony can be pretence, remembrance, or echo (or many more things), and that the causes of its use may be deep in our mind, in the human tendency to obtain pleasure from every activity; or, contradictorily (as irony itself), in our primitive instincts of aggression towards our enemies or opponents.

We have also been exposed to the humoristic side of irony through the presentation of the theories of laughter and mainly through Freud's careful analysis of jokes. There is a very close relationship between irony and humour, and irony and laughter. Being humorous and ironic at the same time can avoid physical hostility. We can prove to be more "elegant" and more "civilised" if we manifest our hostility by means of irony.

Since humour is considered to be one of the characteristics of healthy minds, we could then easily conclude that being ironic is also very healthy in most cases, and that is one of the causes that makes it worth investigating.

I have also tried to show evidence in favour of three of the initial hypotheses (5, 6 and 7) by means of some examples belonging to the corpora analysed. It has thus been concluded that not all ironic utterances are instances of echoic mention, nor do all of them convey a derogatory attitude, and also that not all ironic utterances can be said to be instances of "pretence".

As regards the speaker's attitude, it has been shown that

a speaker can sometimes use irony as an aggressive tool (and therefore be sarcastic), but he can also use it with the intention of praising the addressee; what is more surprising is that, in some special cases, he may be neutral and have no intention of conveying any critical attitude whatsoever.

Having tackled one of the most prominent issues in the production and reception of irony, namely psychological motivation and mechanisms, I now turn to analyse verbal irony from a sociolinguistic perspective. In particular, I shall look at it from the standpoint of Politeness Theory.

Chapter 5: IRONY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF  
POLITENESS THEORY

<<The true ironist will be the man who can be ironical in ways not permitted by the rules, values, and norms of his speech community. the reason is obvious: the less likely the occurrence of irony the more impact it can have.>>

D.C. Muecke, *The Communication of Verbal Irony*

<<Alice felt dreadfully puzzled. The Hatter's remark seemed to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English. "I don't quite understand you", she said, as politely as she could.>>

L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

### 5.1 Introduction

It would not be fair to study verbal irony without taking into account the perspective that views the phenomenon as one of the strategies of politeness that speakers use to reach certain communicative aims. This view focuses more on the sociological aspect than on the psychological one.

The main aim of this chapter is, thus, to discuss the type of strategies and the sociological variables intervening in the phenomenon of irony in the light of the Theory of Politeness. In particular, I shall discuss some of the issues put forward by

Brown & Levinson in *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987, first published in 1978).

Whereas Leech (1983) places irony as one of the "principles of pragmatics" of interpersonal rhetoric (i.e. "a second-order principle which builds upon , or exploits, the principle of politeness" (1983: 82)), Brown & Levinson place irony as one possible politeness strategy; more precisely, as a substrategy of the major politeness strategy n° 4 (off record) for doing Face Threatening Acts (hereinafter FTAs). According to Brown & Levinson, "a communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act" (1987: 211). Off record utterances are essentially indirect uses of language, and, in all cases, the hearer must make some inference to recover the intended meaning of the speaker. All off record strategies (in Brown & Levinson's view) violate one of the Gricean Maxims. "Be ironic" is placed as a strategy violating only the Quality Maxim (1987: 214). The observation of many ironic utterances in the corpus studied led me to have some doubts in this respect, and, therefore, I formulated the following research question:

Can an ironic speaker/writer violate the other Gricean maxims as well?

from which the following hypothesis was derived (Hypothesis n° 7 in the Introduction):

*An ironic speaker/writer can not only violate the Quality Maxim but also the other three Gricean Maxims.*

I shall try to present evidence to confirm this hypothesis, for I believe that Brown & Levinson's conception is based on a

traditional view of irony; i.e., they have restricted irony to conditions of truth and falsity, to "opposite propositions", and, as I have tried to explain in chapter 2, the problem does not appear to be so simple.

Another of the research questions of my investigation of irony in the field of politeness phenomena was the following:

Does irony fit perfectly within off record strategies, or is it that many times the ironic speaker can make use of on record strategies to make his/her point?

This question originated from the observation that, in the corpora studied here, some ironical utterances were found in which it was clear that the speaker was also using Positive and/or Negative Politeness and both these strategies are presented by Brown & Levinson as *on record*<sup>2</sup>.

From the above research question the following hypothesis was derived (Research Hypothesis n° 8 in the Introductory chapter of this dissertation)

*An ironic speaker/writer can make use not only of off record strategies but also of on record ones to make his point. The frequency of occurrence of the former strategies is higher than that of the latter, but this does not deny the existence of the latter.*

This would imply that a speaker can go off record with Negative and/or Positive Politeness (as will be shown in 5.3), something which is not in agreement with Brown & Levinson's scheme of strategies, which I reproduce in Figure 5.a:

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<sup>2</sup>"An actor goes on record in doing an act A if it is clear to participants what communicative intention led the actor to do A, (i.e., there is just one unambiguously attributable intention with which witnesses would concur)" (1987: 68-9).

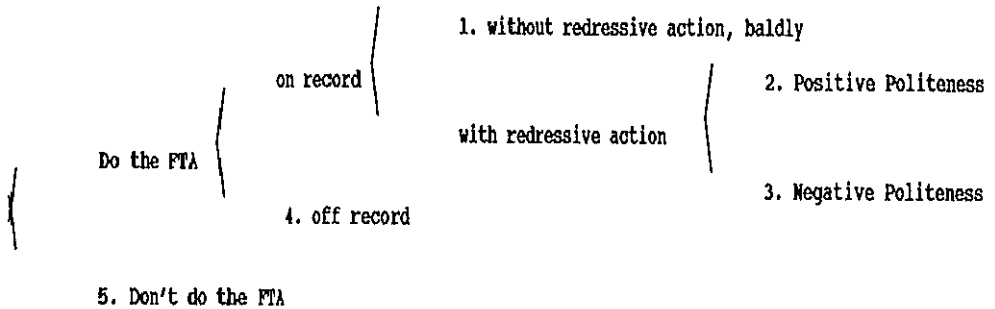


Fig. 5.a: Possible Strategies for doing FTA's (1987: 69)

I shall try to show that there are various possible combinations of both on record and off record strategies, and that, even within the different substrategies labelled by Brown & Levinson as off record, irony is not just one single, isolated substrategy: it can combine with the other off record strategies as well. From this last observation, the next hypothesis was formulated (Research Hypothesis n° 9 in the Introduction):

*A speaker/writer can make different off record strategies co-occur in order to convey an ironic meaning.*

This would again imply that irony is not so simple a phenomenon as to be placed as a number on a list of substrategies which are distinct and separate from one another. Politeness theory serves my purpose in this respect, for it will allow us to observe the versatility of the phenomenon by means of the appreciation of the richness of the possibilities of combination of strategies. The sheer variety of the phenomenon is indeed a temptation to the thesis maker.

A final analysis is made in this chapter on the

influence of the sociological variables P (power), D (distance) and R (ranking of imposition of the particular culture) upon the use of verbal irony. The initial research question was the following:

Do the sociological variables P, D and R have any influence upon the use of verbal irony? If so, in what ways do they affect it?

And the resulting hypothesis was Research Hypothesis n° 10:

*The sociological variables P, D, and R influence the use of verbal irony*

The ways in which these variables affect the choice of strategies within the use of verbal irony will be discussed in some of the examples in the corpus, although I am conscious of the fact that these variables may interact in rather intricate and complicated ways, and consequently further and deeper research than the one done in this piece of work would be desirable in the future to be able to make valid generalisations.

I shall now proceed to the discussion of the issues raised in this introduction by trying to give evidence for the confirmation of Research Hypothesis n° 7, in connection with irony and the violation of the Gricean Maxims.

## 5.2 Verbal irony and the maxims of Grice's Cooperative principle

From Brown & Levinson's definition of off record strategies, it can be deduced that this type of strategy is the ideal one to use when the speaker/writer wants to avoid responsibility (to a certain extent) for doing his FTA. By going



off record, the speaker can leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret the FTA. The clue to the correct interpretation of off record FTAs lies in the making of some inferences which will allow the addressee to understand what was, in fact, intended by the speaker. The off record speaker or writer, thus, invites conversational implicatures by flouting the Gricean Maxims of Communication in some way. Brown & Levinson arrange their list of off record strategies according to the maxim that they believe each strategy violates [see their chart, (1987: 214)]. As was anticipated in the introduction to this chapter, "Be ironic" is included within the strategies that violate the Quality Maxim, and one of the aims of this part of my work is to try to show that it can violate the other three Gricean Maxims as well. Leech (1983) implicitly holds this hypothesis when, after presenting example [1], he states that it can easily tip over into an ironic interpretation:

- [1] A: We'll all miss Bill and Agatha, won't we?  
B: Well. we'll all miss BILL<sup>3</sup>

(1983: 80)

We could not say that B is here flouting the Quality Maxim, for he is telling the truth. This example is presented by Leech as breaking the Quantity Maxim, as can be clearly observed, for when A asks B to confirm A's opinion, B merely confirms part of it and pointedly ignores the rest. Leech relates this fact to the exploitation not only of the Irony Principle but also of the Principle of Politeness, for B could have been more informative

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<sup>3</sup> Leech notes that the reply in [1] would almost certainly have a fall-rise tone, which is an intonation often associated with indirect implicature. This is a point that I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 6.

but only at the cost of being more impolite to a third party (1983: 81). Thus, from Leech's reasoning, it can be concluded that people are ironic in order to avoid being impolite<sup>4</sup>.

I shall now present and discuss certain examples found in the corpus that give evidence of the violation of the four Gricean Maxims by ironic speakers/writers.

### 5.2.1 Maxim of Quality<sup>5</sup>

As I have discussed in a previous paper (Alba Juez, 1995a), the fact that Brown & Levinson consider irony as a strategy that violates only the Maxim of Quality is consistent with their view of irony as meaning "the opposite" of what is said literally, since, in this way, it is clearly seen that one is not "making a true contribution". This would include prototypical examples of verbal irony such as "John's a fine friend" or "John's a genius", meaning "John's not a good friend" and "John's stupid" respectively, where the literal meaning is not true. Examples from the corpus that violate this maxim have already been presented in 2.4.1 of this dissertation under the heading "Prototypical cases". But, as has been repeatedly noted in this thesis, verbal irony goes beyond "not telling the truth", and, since it underlies diverse intellectual mechanisms, it many times violates the other maxims of the Cooperative Principle. Green remarks that there is a greater moral load attached to the

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<sup>4</sup> This is a point that I believe could be refuted for some cases of irony, as I shall try to show in this chapter. Note also that it appears to be the case that when Leech uses the term "politeness" he does not mean the same as Brown and Levinson. Leech seems here to stick more to the "social norm view" (in B. Fraser's terms, (1990: 220)).

<sup>5</sup> The Maxims, as Grice stated them, have been quoted in 3.2.

Maxim of Quality than to the others: "violating it amounts to a moral offense, whereas violating the others is at worst inconsiderate or rude" (1989: 89). I do not believe that this is valid for cases of irony, since, as was discussed in 2.2, although, in many cases, the speaker is performing an "act of misrepresentation" (Fraser, 1994), the intention of the ironist is not to mislead the hearer, an intention that is distinguished from that of the liar, who does intend to mislead the hearer. Consequently, I do not think that a speaker whose intention is to be ironic can be thought of by his hearer to be a moral offender for violating the maxim of quality. In many cases, the ironic speaker is certainly rude and may offend the hearer, but not precisely because of the violation of the maxim in itself but because of the implication of his/her utterance, which is a different thing. The ironic speaker is not lying; on the contrary, s/he wants his hearer to know that he does not mean what s/he says.

Interestingly, for some cases of irony, I have observed that the Maxim of Quality is not violated in the least. As was anticipated in Chapter 2, the ironic speaker sometimes means precisely what s/he says. Martin (1992) presents the following two examples of verbal irony, which, nevertheless, describe an actual state of affairs:

- 1) "Our friends are always there when they need us."
- 2) (A French television thriller called "Torture" was reviewed in the following terms):  
"I have to say that what tortured me most in watching this film was boredom."

(1992: 81-2)

In both examples, the speakers are telling the truth. In the first example, the irony lies in the implicit opposition of they to we (which would be the expected pronoun in that utterance) and of us to them (this represents, at a deeper level, the opposition self/others -see 8.2). It has, for this reason, a comic-ironic effect, but it cannot be said that the speaker is flouting the Maxim of Quality. The second example is not lacking in irony either, although the critic is telling the truth. He takes advantage of the title of the thriller ("Torture") and, therefore, plays with it by using it against the thriller itself, which gives a comic-ironic effect in order to warn his readers about watching the programme in question.

#### 5.2.2 Maxim of Quantity

It was briefly shown in 5.2, by means of an example of Leech's (1983), how an ironic interpretation can be the outcome of the violation of the Maxim of Quantity.

Brown & Levinson present an example of "understatement" violating the Quantity Maxim which seems to be perfect also as an example of ironic utterance (though they do not contemplate such a possibility). This is the case of <<a teenage girl that might say "He's all right" as an understated criticism implicating "I think he's awful" or as an understated compliment implicating "I think he's fabulous">> (1987: 218). In this way, the Maxim of Quantity is flouted by avoiding the lower points in the case of a criticism and by avoiding the upper points in the case of a compliment or admission.

In the following example, Dorothy is being ironical about Blanche's "experience" with men, and by not making further comments or not arguing any longer (i.e. saying less than required), she implies that Blanche has a reputation for having dated a lot of men:

[1] Blanche: You think Dirk looks at me and sees an old woman?. He sees a young, vibrant, passionate contemporary.

Dorothy: Blanche, you haven't even been out with him yet.

Blanche: My instincts are infallible about this. Believe me. I Know men.

Dorothy: No arguments here.

(GG, 1991: 71-2)

Dorothy is violating the maxim of Quantity but not the Maxim of Quality. It can be said of this example (as well as of examples 1 and 2 in the previous section) that the speaker is telling the truth; however, she is being ironic. The fact of not contradicting Blanche seems to show agreement between Dorothy and Blanche, but this agreement turns against Blanche because, by saying that she has no arguments against Blanche, Dorothy is implying that Blanche knows men too well, and, therefore, the apparent agreement turns into a criticism, and here is the source of the irony.

Another instance which I believe supports my argument here is the following exchange between Bernard and Humphrey, in which Humphrey is being uncooperative and sarcastic by flouting the Quantity Maxim, for he is not as informative as required and expected by the situation:

[2] Bernard: What are we supposed to do about it?

Humphrey: Can you keep a secret?

Bernard: Of course!

Humphrey: So can I.

(*YM*, 1994 Video Episode: "Open Government")

Humphrey and Bernard had been previously discussing the problems of the "open government" policy of the Minister (Mr. Hacker), and Humphrey now lets Bernard infer that he has a secret plan against the Minister by saying "Can you keep a secret?", to which Bernard answers "of course", expecting that the logical consequence of saying so will be the immediate telling of the secret on the part of Humphrey; however, contrary to his expectations (and those of the audience's), Humphrey replies, "so can I", which is a sarcastic way of saying, "I don't trust you, consequently, I won't tell you the secret". He is, therefore, being uncooperative by breaking the Quantity Maxim (giving less information than required), which triggers a humorous and ironic effect. Again, it can not be said that the ironic speaker (Humphrey in this case) is not telling the truth. He is saying something that is true (i.e., that he can keep a secret) but which, nevertheless, has an ironical effect (mainly based on the contradiction between the expectations of the hearer (Bernard) and the actual reaction of the speaker (Humphrey)).

### 5.2.3 Maxim of Relevance

The way in which Grice stated that this Maxim should be accomplished (i.e. by "making one's contribution relevant") has been interpreted differently by different authors. Brown and Levinson consider that there are some off record strategies in which the Maxim of Relevance is violated, such as: a) "Give hints", b) "Give association clues" and c) "Presuppose" (1987: 215-17). The interpretation given is the following: "If the speaker says something that is not explicitly relevant, he invites the hearer to search for an interpretation of possible relevance" (1987: 213), and this, I believe, is something that can also happen when someone is being ironic.

Brown & Levinson show that one way of violating the Maxim of Relevance is by using euphemisms. In the following chunk of dialogue, Dorothy uses a euphemism ("pillow talk") to be ironical towards Blanche, and Sophia goes even further with the ironic tone set up by Dorothy:

[1] Rose: Your date is over?

Blanche: You sound surprised.

Dorothy: Well, it's just that your dates usually end with a little -pillow talk.

Sophia: Yeah, like, "What did you say your name was again?"

(GG, 1991: 186)

Dorothy uses a euphemism to express her surprise about Blanche having finished a date without going to bed with the man in

question. In addition, she uses the word "little", which is functioning as a hedge here and is ironical, too, because Blanche has a reputation for always experiencing great and repetitive "sessions of pillow talk". The background knowledge of Blanche's character triggers this humorous and ironic effect, which becomes even more humorous and sarcastic after Sophia's comment on the kind of "pillow talk": it is obvious that, by saying that Blanche asks her lovers about their names when they are in bed, Sophia implies that Blanche goes to bed with any unknown man she comes across, and this is interpreted by the audience as an bitter ironic (sarcastic) criticism.

Brown & Levinson admit that some indirect criticisms could fall within the first strategy they consider as violating the Relevance Maxim, i.e., "Give hints", but they add that the construction of hints for indirect criticisms involves complex processes beyond the scope of their paper and even beyond their "present understanding" (1987: 215).

I believe that it is not difficult to see that all instances of ironic criticism involve "Giving hints" on the part of the speaker, since they are pieces of indirect criticism, and, consequently, some hint has to be given in order to understand the message conveyed. Perhaps this is why David Holdcroft notes that "an ironical text is full of violations of the maxims of Relevance and Manner" (1983: 506).

I shall turn to one more example found in the corpus which can be interpreted as a violation of the Relevance Maxim with an ironic intention. Examine the following dyad between



Hacker (the Minister of Administrative Affairs) and Humphrey (his Private Secretary) after Humphrey makes the Minister realise that he has "put his foot in" and that the Prime Minister is very upset with him (Hacker). Hacker is now frightened and asks:

[2] Hacker: What's going to happen?

Humphrey: The Prime Minister giveth, and the Prime Minister taketh away.

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: "Open Government")

Apparently, Humphrey is not being relevant here, because, instead of answering what is going to happen directly, he indirectly (by using sarcastic echoic irony) says that Hacker will be dismissed by the Prime Minister. Humphrey does not say this "bold on record"; instead, he gives hints and association clues to make Hacker understand what will happen, which causes a humorous effect for the audience, who also rejoices in observing Humphrey's cynicism.

Some comment should be made here about the fact that there are authors, such as Sperber & Wilson, who believe that the Relevance Principle is never violated, for they support the idea that "Relevance may be achieved by expressing irrelevant assumptions, as long as this expressive behaviour is in itself relevant" (1986: 121). Then the relevance of ironic utterances lies in the information it gives about the speaker's attitude towards the "attributed thought" (for, as we saw in 4.3, in their opinion, ironic utterances are always cases of echoic use of attributed thoughts). This interpretation of the Principle of

Relevance is evidently wider than the one given by Brown & Levinson. From the standpoint of Relevance Theory, communicators could not violate the principle of relevance even if they wanted to (1986: 162). There are, according to Sperber & Wilson, many situations where the speaker who is aiming at optional relevance should not give a literal interpretation of his/her thought, and where the hearer should not treat his/her utterance as literal (1986: 233). This is a valid position, but the argument put forward in this section has to do with the way in which the violation of the Maxim of Relevance is presented in Brown & Levinson's Theory of Politeness. Following their reasoning (as well as Grice's), the Maxim of Relevance can be flouted sometimes, and this, I have tried to show, can also be the case for ironic utterances.

#### 5.2.4 Maxim of Manner

An argument can also be put forward in favour of the possibility of violation of the Maxim of Manner by ironic speakers in some cases. In many instances, the speaker is not "perspicuous", at least in two respects: he is both obscure and ambiguous. He may be brief and orderly, but, when going off record, he will not precisely try to avoid obscurity and ambiguity. He will most probably be obscure and/or ambiguous in order to minimise the FTA or to avoid responsibility. This would apply perfectly to most ironic utterances, in which the implicatures are cancellable, though not to those cases of

conventionalised or implicature-free verbal irony in which the implicatures are not cancellable or there is no conversational implicature to be worked out (see 3.3.1 and 7.2.2).

Following is an example from the *London Lund Corpus of English Conversation*, in which two female secretaries are talking about another woman. By saying that this woman "is not of the most helpful variety", C is being ambiguous (because she does not clearly say that she is unhelpful), and, at the same time, she is ironically criticising her (the intonation with a falling tone on "helpful" and a rising one on "variety", as well as the laughter, also help decipher the ironic interpretation, as will be shown and discussed in Chapter 6):

[1]

```

C 11 . and [[:] they ^don't 'seem to b/other _any_body# /
A 11 ^n\o# /
C 11 they ^seem to 'know their 'way ar/ound# /
A 11 so it ^d\oes 'seem# /
A 11 a ^fairly 'self-con'tained *'unit 'on its \own##* /
C 11 *it ^\is# /
C 11 ^v\ery 'self-con'tained##* /
A 11 ^y\es# /
C 11 ^and I !think one of the :reasons Miss 'Baker /
C 11 sug:gest((ed)) I 'show you ((a)r\ound# /
C 11 I ^don't think you've met :Nelly 'Cartwright /
C 11 up:st\airs# /
A 11 ^n\o# /
(C 11 ^I won't ![pri: - @:~] - - - wh\at's the 'word# - /
C 11 ^pre-per!su\ade you# /
C 11 but [[:] *-~ - she's ^not of the most :h\elpful /
C 11 **.** var/iety# . /
A 11 *(laughs - - )* **^y\eah##** /
C 11 [[:~] ^I don't kn\ow# /
C 11 you ^may 'hit it :\off with her# /

```

(LLC, S.1.5.)

The Maxim of Quantity seems also to have been flouted in this

example, for C is being "less informative than required" by minimising in some way the expression referring to Ms Cartwright's unhelpfulness.

Apart from the fact that prototypical cases of irony violate the Quality Maxim, all of these cases could be said to be ambiguous, in which case they would violate the Maxim of Manner as well. The following passage from one of Bertrand Russell's essays seems to illustrate one of these cases:

<<Some astronomers try to cheer us up in moments of depression by assuring us that one fine day the sun will explode, and in the twinkling of an eye we shall all be turned into gas>>

(BR, 1958: 31)

Strictly speaking, Russell could be accused here of being obscure and ambiguous for not saying directly that, by foretelling that we are all doomed to such a fate, astronomers are not cheering us up and that the day in which the sun will explode will not be a *fine* day. But this violation of both the Quality and the Manner Maxims of the Cooperative Principle serves Russell's ironic purposes of criticising those people who, in his opinion, "imagine themselves on the throne of the Almighty" (1958: 31).

The analysis and examples presented hitherto seem to give evidence confirming Hypothesis n° 7, which tries to show that irony is not only related to the Maxim of Quality, but also to the other three Gricean Maxims (Quantity, Relevance and Manner). Quantitative data for a further confirmation of this

hypothesis will be given in 7.2.2.1.

In any case, the view of irony as violating the Gricean Maxims illuminates the nature of propositional irony, as Holdcroft (1983) states. For cases of illocutionary irony, perhaps the explanation founded on the violation of the maxims is not that illuminating, for, as Holdcroft observes:

<<The illocutionary ironist on a direct reading may breach no maxim: indeed, perhaps the only clue that he is being ironic is the fact that he is so uncritically fulsome.>> (1983: 507).

The observation of this fact, and its confirmation through several examples found in the corpora used in this investigation, led me to conclude that there is a type of verbal irony that could be labelled as "implicature-free", for when using this type, the speaker/writer flouts no maxim but is nevertheless ironic (see 7.2.2).

### 5.3 Irony in relation to Positive and Negative Politeness

As was anticipated in the Introduction to this chapter and discussed in a previous paper (Alba Juez, 1995c), after analysing and studying many of the examples in the corpus, I noticed that, in many instances, the ironic speaker was clearly addressing not only the hearer's positive needs, but also his negative face needs, which would entail that this kind of speaker not only makes use of off record strategies but also of on record ones, since, as Brown & Levinson state in their theory (and as can be seen in their chart, reproduced here in 5.1), Positive and

Negative Politeness are substrategies of the higher order strategy on record.

In other words, what I have observed is that sometimes the speaker chooses to be ironic precisely because s/he wants to make concessions to his/her own or the hearer's positive face, or in other cases, to his/her own or the hearer's negative face. Thus, when going off record, a speaker is also using on record strategies. Saving face seems to be a concern for both on record and off record speakers. Then, redressive action can also be a characteristic of off record FTAs.

Brown & Levinson do in fact believe that there may exist a kind of "on record-off recordness" only in some special cases such as the one shown when using conventionally indirect requests as a negative politeness strategy (e.g. "Could you please pass the salt?", which should not be interpreted as a question about the addressee's potential abilities). They also acknowledge that:

<<Many of the classic off record strategies -metaphor, irony, understatement, rhetorical questions, etc- are very often on record when used, because the clues to their interpretation (the mutual knowledge of S and H in the context, the intonational, prosodic and kinesic clues to speaker's attitude; the clues derived from conversational sequencing) add up to only one really viable interpretation in the context.>> (1987: 212)

From these lines, I infer that Brown & Levinson would think of on record-off recordness for irony only in those cases in which it is conventionalised, and there can be no other possible interpretation. However, they never go too deeply into the analysis of irony and they do not put forward any arguments about

what they understand to be conventionalised instances of irony. I have already presented (in 3.3.1) instances of what I judge to be conventionalised and non-conventionalised verbal irony, and, with respect to the issue discussed in this section, I believe, contrary to Brown & Levinson- that an ironic speaker can use both on record and off record strategies even when using non-conventionalised verbal irony. This can be seen in the examples I shall present of what I shall call "Positive" and "Negative Irony".

### 5.3.1 Positive and Negative Irony

As was discussed in 4.3.1.2 (and shown by means of corpus examples), not all cases of irony convey a derogatory attitude. Some authors [Cicero (circa 100 BC), King & Crerar (1969), Haverkate (1988), Holdcroft (1983), Norrick (1994), Lakoff (1972), Leech (1983), Kaufer (1983), Muecke (1970)] hold the belief that it can also convey praise or some positive feeling towards the hearer, in opposition to some others, like Brown & Levinson or Sperber & Wilson, who state that verbal irony always has a deprecating nature.

I also tried to show in 4.3.1.2 that there is apparently a third kind of verbal irony which is intended neither to criticise nor to praise, which could be considered as "neutral". The first two kinds of irony, i.e., "derogatory irony" and "praising irony", seem to be in close connection with positive and negative politeness. It is my impression that

derogatory irony is always a strategy that has to do mainly with Negative Politeness and the negative face of the addressee, and that praising irony has to do mainly with Positive Politeness and the Positive face of the addressee. Hence, I shall call the former *Negative Irony* and the latter *Positive Irony*. If someone is praising another person -be it by means of irony or by any other means- he or she is carrying out redressive action directed to the addressee's positive face (i.e. his perennial desire that his wants (or actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable). We may also encounter certain instances of positive irony in which the intention is not precisely to praise, but in which the speaker still addresses the positive face of the addressee, as can be deduced, for instance, from the observations made by Leech (1983) and Kasper (1990) about the speech "sounding" described by Labov (1972) as exchanges of "ritual insults" by New York black adolescents. Kasper describes ritual insults as instances of "ironic rudeness" and "mock impoliteness" (1990: 211). Leech presents them as instances of "banter" or "mock irony" (1983: 144-5). Booth (1974) also writes about a kind of ironic attack which takes the form of pretended satire and often expresses distance or hostility, but which social custom requires to be taken without deep offense. He illustrates his point with some African tribes in whose culture this form of teasing depends on a relation between two persons (or even two tribes) in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who, in turn, is required to take no offence. A similar situation is



found in the "flyting " of some "joking relationships" in some English dialects (1974: 30).

When the speaker is using negative irony to criticise someone, s/he is carrying out redressive action directed to the addressee's negative face in the sense that s/he is making an effort not to surpass the hearer's territory in an excessive way. Thus, by being ambiguous and indirect, the speaker is trying not to impede the hearer's wants or actions. Then, it is often the case that an ironic speaker uses Negative Politeness to criticise or make his/her hearer feel inferior, as will be seen in some examples in the corpus. Leech explains this phenomenon by saying that, whereas "overpoliteness" can have the effect of signifying superiority or ironic distance, underpoliteness can have the opposite effect of establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity (1983: 144).

Sometimes Positive and Negative Irony can co-occur in the same utterance. Suppose that I have a friend who is not very self confident, and, after doing an exam, he says to me:

"I'm going to fail this exam. I did it all wrong."

After some days I meet him and he tells me that he has passed the exam with a very good mark. Then I could ironically say (and this would also be a clear example of echoic mention):

"Oh, yes, you have failed, you did it all wrong, you are an awful student!"

In this particular context, I would be criticising and praising my friend at the same time. I would criticise his previous self-deprecating attitude, but I would also be praising him by

implicating that I think he is better and cleverer than he himself had thought he was.

The above discussion has led me to conclude that hypothesis n°8 can be accepted, i.e. Positive and Negative Politeness can also be substrategies on an off record strategy, for as it has been argued and will be shown in the examples, a speaker can be ironic with Positive Politeness (and thus serve certain purposes) or he can be ironic with Negative Politeness (and thus serve certain other purposes).

A good example of the fact that irony can be combined with Positive Politeness is provided by Brown & Levinson, although they present it only as an instance of an "on record with Positive Politeness" strategy, namely, strategy n° 8: "Joke". Brown & Levinson note that a speaker could be joking and say to his friend:

"How about lending me this old heap of junk? (H's new Cadillac)" (1987: 124)

Since both friends know that the car is a new Cadillac and consequently that it is by no means "an old heap of junk", apart from understanding that this is a joke, the hearer will also understand that s/he should not take his/her friend literally, and that, on the contrary, his/her friend is addressing his/her positive face and wants to signify that s/he admires his/her new car or, in more technical terms, that "s/he wants his wants". This is a prototypical case of "irony with Positive Politeness", i.e., Positive Irony (in which the speaker wants to maintain the hearer's positive face).

The following passage, taken from a pamphlet written by Jonathan Swift [quoted by King & Crerar (1969)] is proof of the possibility of combination of irony with Negative Politeness. It is endowed with all the formality and "conventional indirectness" typical of Negative Politeness strategies, but at the same time is an example of the sardonic criticism characteristic of Negative Irony:

<<Another advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is the clear gain of one day in seven, which is now entirely lost, and consequently the kingdom one seventh less considerable in trade, business, and pleasure; besides the loss to the public of so many stately structures, now in the hands of the clergy, which might be converted into playhouses, market-houses, exchanges, common dormitories, and other public edifices.

I hope I shall be forgiven a hard word, if I call this a perfect cavil. I readily own there has been an old custom, time out of mind, for people to assemble in the churches every Sunday, and that shops are still frequently shut, in order, as it is conceived, to preserve the memory of that ancient practice; but how this can prove a hindrance to business or pleasure, is hard to imagine. What if the men of pleasure are forced, one day in the week, to game at home instead of the chocolate-houses? are not the taverns and coffee-houses open? can there be a more convenient season for taking a dose of physic? is not that the chief day for traders to sum up the accounts of the week, and for lawyers to prepare their briefs?. But I would fain know how it can be pretended that the churches are mis-applied?. Where are more appointments and rendezvouses of gallantry? where more care to appear in the foremost box, with greater advantage of dress? where more meetings for business? where more bargains driven of all sorts? and where so many conveniences or enticements to sleep?>>

(1969: 128-9)

Obviously, Swift's diction suggests a period remote to our own, but in familiar every day present language, it seems to be often the case that we use Negative Politeness together with irony.

If, for instance, a woman does not want her husband to be rude to her (e.g. when requesting something) and always tells him that he should be more "polite" (in the common sense of the word) to her, the husband might make a future request in either of the following sardonic ironical ways (presenting a "clash" between speech acts, i.e. irony at the illocutionary level -see 3.4 and 7.2.3-)

"Excuse me for bothering you, but would you be so kind as to make me a cup of coffee?"

or:

"Will Her Majesty prepare me a cup of coffee?"

which would mean: "it sounds ridiculous to me to treat you this way, but considering you want me to be polite, I am mocking you by being polite in an exaggerated way (Leech's "overpoliteness"). Haverkate presents a similar example illustrating this kind of illocutionary irony:

"Could you do me the favour of shutting up?" (1988: 85)

Leech's ironic example "Do you have to spill ash on the carpet?" (1983: 143) and Searle's "Ought you to eat quite so much spaghetti?" (1975: 66) seem to be also valid to support my argument here.

Many examples of this combination of off record and on record strategies were found in the corpus. I now turn to them.

### 5.3.2 Corpus examples of verbal irony used in combination with Positive and/or Negative Politeness

I have observed in the wide variety of ironic examples

in the corpus that some typical devices of Negative Politeness are very often used in ironical remarks. I refer to hedges and/or indirect conventionalised questions. Consider the following conversation between Rose and the Reverend Avery:

[1] Reverend

Avery: Well, before we open the doors, I just want to thank you all for taking time away from your own Christmas to provide Christmas for some that are less fortunate. We promise to turn away no one, remembering how Mary and Joseph were turned away at the inn,

Rose: Reverend Avery -it's always puzzled me; why didn't Mary and Joseph call ahead for reservations?. Surely they must have realized how impossible it is to get a hotel room during the Christmas season

Reverend

Avery: I guess that's one for the theologians, Rose.

(GG, 1991: 160)

In his last remark, the Reverend is ironical about Rose's previous comment (implying that it was irrelevant and silly), but, at the same time, he is trying not to be rude (and therefore trying to maintain her negative face by not imposing on her or impeding her actions) by using the hedge "I guess". This hedge has the effect of softening the following observation ("That's one for the theologians") which is certainly ironic, for anyone would laugh at the possibility of such a silly observation being a serious matter to be analysed by theologians.

Hedges constitute a device that allows the speaker to show that he does not try to "trespass" the hearer's or a third person's territory. In the following example, the speaker (A) tries to soften the criticism he is making of the lecturer they are talking about (a third and absent person) by using the hedge

"I'm not quite sure...", although he is in fact being ironic and "economical with the truth": he really means that in his opinion, the lecture was useless:

[2]

A 11 ^oh d\ear# /  
 A 12 ^what was 'he - ^I can't even re!member !what he /  
 A 12 was d/\oing# /  
 A 11 the ^day I :went to his :l\ecture# /  
 A 11 but ^I re!member that 'he - :brought 'out !thr\ee /  
 A 11 'things \_in# . /  
 A 11 "^\Old /English# /  
 A 12 ((^you !cl\assicists)) [??] ^you've \_probably not /  
 A 12 !d\one Old /English# /  
 A 11 ^h\ave 'you# - /  
 A 11 ^c\ourse you 'haven't# - - /  
 A 11 ^bin\_dan 'rin\_dan \_and w\in'dan# /  
 A 11 the ^three v\erbs# /  
 A 11 ^{?}all . ((are)) rh/ymin# /  
 A 11 ^and 'they !\all ((are)) :d=oing# /  
 A 11 with ^something 'going :r\ound# /  
 A 11 ^bin\_dan to b/ind# /  
 A 11 ^win\_dan to w\ind# /  
 A 11 and . ^rin'dan :to . "l\_r\ind# /  
 A 11 you ^kn/ow# /  
 A 11 a ^p\ig# /  
 A,B 20 ( - - laugh) /  
 B 11 \*( - - - laughs)\* \*\*^[/\m]#\*\* /  
 A 11 \*^this is the !only thing I've 'brought a!!w\ay /  
 A 11 from that l/ecture# /  
 A 11 -\* - - I'm ^not quite 'sure what he was . trying /  
 A 11 \*\*to\*\* . pr\ove with th/em# /  
 A 11 ^when he'd !f\inished# /  
 A 20 (\*-\* - - laughs) /

(LLC, S.1.6.)

In this example, the irony is aimed at the negative face of the third person in question, as is the case with most situations in which two speakers are ironically criticising a third participant (present or absent). But this irony is also aimed at the positive face of the hearer or addressee, i.e., there is also positive politeness between the two interlocutors, for it is

often the case that the ironic speaker wants to show his hearer that s/he trusts him/her and that he considers him /her a "cooperator", establishing in this way a mutual complicity. As Sperber (1974) notes, "irony against a third party is an invitation to real complicity. Inversely, irony directed against the hearer is an invitation to keep one's distance" (1974: 144).

As we know (see 4.3.1), Sperber does not consider the possibility of "Positive Irony", and that is why he states that irony towards the hearer is always an invitation to keep distance. I have already spoken of the fact that irony towards the hearer can also have the intention of praising or showing positive feelings or a positive evaluation of the hearer, even when this is not so frequent a strategy as the one addressing his/her negative face. I now turn to one of these less frequently found cases:

[3]

B	11	^=um# -	/
B	12	^[?]it's [?] . ^w\ell# .	/
B	11	^I'm . em!{pl\oyed as a) :mathemalt\ician# -	/
B	11	sta^tistics is what I :sh\ould know#	/
B	11	((and)) I ^don't know 'anything a:b\out it#	/
B	11	"^r\eally#	/
A	20	( - . laughs)	/
(B	11	^pr\ogramming (com^p\uters#)# -	/
B	11	*({^th\at's what /I do#))*	/
A	11	*^y\es#	/
A	11	do* ^you know 'Malcolm B\owen#	/
A	11	^over at the comp\uter /unit#	/
B	11	^[m]#	/
A	11	^nice b/oy# -	/
A	11	^sure !he'd h/elp you#	/
A	11	if you ^got st\uck#	/
B	20	( - - laughs) -	/

(LLC, S.1.6.)

When A (a female academic) says that Malcom could help B (a male

academic) if B got stuck, she is ironical and she is joking, for B has just said that programming computers is precisely what he does, so she is in fact addressing his positive face by implicating that he needs no help and that it is very unlikely that he would ever get stuck. The laughter coming afterwards shows that, in effect, it has been interpreted as an ironical joke on B's part.

Returning to the use of ironic Negative Politeness as a weapon against a third party and a sign of complicity between interlocutors, consider this remark by Bertrand Russell:

- [4] <<Cruelty is in theory a perfectly adequate ground for divorce, but it may be interpreted so as to become absurd. When the most eminent of all film stars was divorced by his wife for cruelty, one of the counts in the proof of cruelty was that he used to bring home friends who talked about Kant. I can hardly suppose that it was the intention of the California legislators to enable any woman to divorce her husband on the ground that he was sometimes guilty of intelligent conversation in her presence.>>

(BR, 1958: 72-3)

The sarcasm of Russell's final comment here lies in the use of the Negative Politeness hedge "I can hardly suppose..", which simulates consideration for and innocent belief about the California legislators, but which ironically implicates that he does suspect them of being rather ignorant and scarcely intelligent, to such an extent that they dare to condemn people because they can maintain intelligent conversation. Thus, the aggressive or Negative Irony is here directed against the legislators (a third party), whereas he establishes certain complicity with his readers, which implies the use of Positive



Politeness towards them. It is as if he said: "You and I know that this is wrong, so I make you my accomplice in criticising and condemning this behaviour or these ideas". In general, this is always the case with all of Russel's argumentative writing. He is very critical of social conventions, religion, politics and other aspects of human life, and he expects his readers to share his views and ideas.

A similar example, though different in that the Negative Politeness is directed against the hearer, is found in one comment made by the President of Buranda in a conversation with Hacker (the British Minister of Administrative Affairs) in the television series "*Yes Minister*":

[5] Hacker: Oh, Charlie, may I speak frankly? We are friends, aren't we?

President  
of Buranda: Of course.

Hacker: You must realise that bit about colonialist depression was a bit, well, very, well, actually profoundly embarrassing.

P of B: Why?

Hacker: That passage in which you urge the Scots and the Irish to uh, eh... I wonder if you could uh, give it a miss.

P of B: Give it a miss??

Hacker: Yes.

P of B: But this is something I feel very, very deeply to be true. Surely the British don't believe in suppressing the truth.

Hacker: Good Heavens, No!

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: "The Official Visit")

On his visit to Britain, the President of Buranda has not been favourable to the British Government both in his comments and written documents. Hacker is trying to use their old friendship (they were classmates at College) in order to "hush him up". The President of Buranda then uses irony with Negative Politeness (so that he can sound "polite") to show that he can not be bribed or threatened easily. "Surely the British don't believe in suppressing the truth" is a hedged ironical remark that addresses Hacker's negative face and leaves him no way out and no more possibilities of trying to bribe the president of Buranda. In fact, the President does think that the British want to suppress the truth, given the evidence of Hacker's intent to make him withdraw his previous public criticisms against British colonialism.

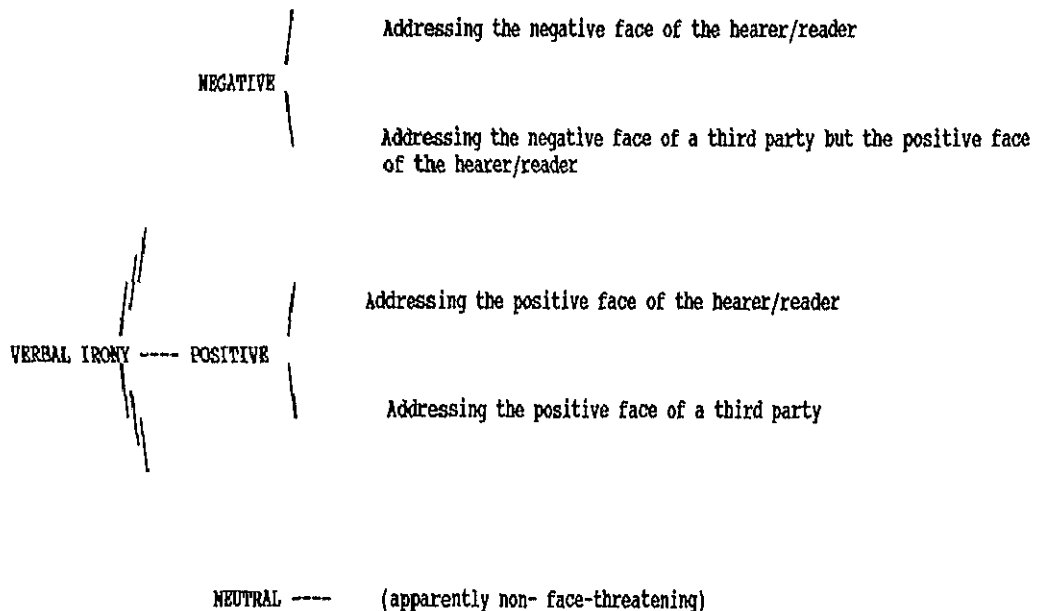
### 5.3.3 Irony and Positive/Negative Politeness: recapitulation

The examples discussed in the previous section, as well as a careful meditation on the phenomenon of irony in the light of Politeness Theory, have led me to conclude that, in effect, both Positive and Negative Politeness may be used as tools to convey ironic meanings. It has been shown that these two kinds of politeness may be both directed either to the positive or the negative face of the addressee, or to both faces simultaneously. As has been explained and shown in previous chapters (3 and 4), a speaker may sometimes be ironic but neutral, which implies he is neither criticising nor praising or making any kind of

evaluation. In this particular case, the ironic utterance does not seem to threaten anybody's face, in which case it would be logical to think that some ironic remarks can not be considered FTAs<sup>6</sup>. From these considerations I have come to the conclusion that there are three main kinds of verbal irony: *Positive*, *Negative* and *Neutral*, and, within these three main categories, there are numerous substrategies (as will be shown in chapter 8).

The possibilities exploited in this chapter are illustrated in Figure 5.b:

Figure 5.b: Main irony types viewed from the Politeness perspective



<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Bruce Fraser points out that, although all acts are inherently FTAs because they require the hearer to do work to understand the speaker's communicative intentions, "nearly all (perhaps all) acts can be construed as non-FTAs under appropriate circumstances" (1990: 229).

I have not found instances in the corpus of positive irony addressing the positive face of a third party, but the example quoted by King & Crerar (1969: 116-7) and discussed in this dissertation in 4.3.1.2 is proof of its possibility of occurrence. King & Crerar present it as an instance of irony used to convey praise. I am referring to the speech delivered by the chairman of a testimonial dinner in honour of Mr. Frank Faulkner. The chairman is addressing the audience and uses irony with Positive Politeness towards Mr. Frank Faulkner (the third party), for he speaks about some "flaws" of character that Mr. Faulkner had, which should be interpreted as an ironical way of saying that he had no flaws, and that he was indeed a great person.

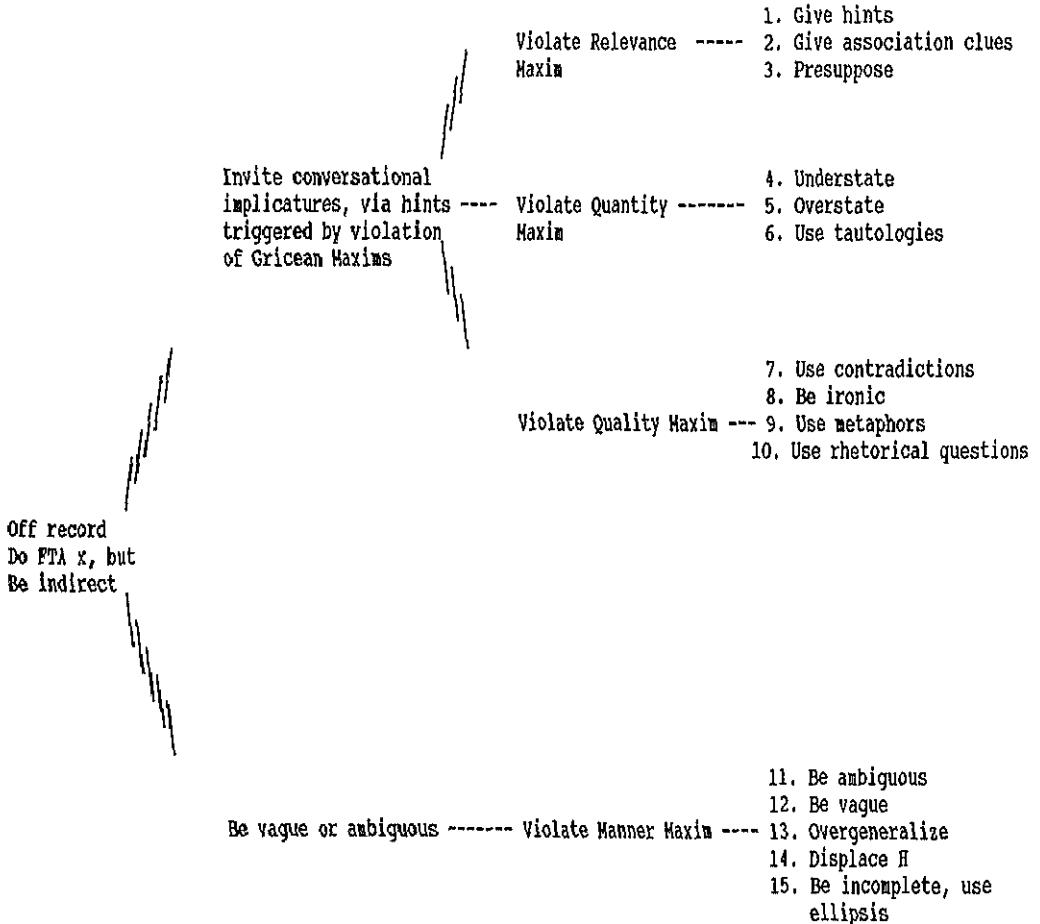
Up to this point in this chapter, I have been discussing the possibility of the combination of two on record strategies (Positive and Negative Politeness) with off record irony. The next step will be to analyse the possibility of the combination of verbal irony with the other off record strategies in the taxonomy created by Brown & Levinson.

#### 5.4 Irony and the other off record strategies

Figure 5.c reproduces the chart in which Brown & Levinson present their taxonomy of off record strategies. As may have been anticipated (after considering the possibility of violation of other maxims on the part of an ironic speaker), it has been observed in this investigation that a speaker may make

use of any of these off record strategies to convey an ironic meaning.

Figure 5.6: Chart of off record strategies (in Brown & Levinson's model)



(1987: 214)

The first strategy in the chart ("Give hints") is a strategy that could be said to be used in most cases of irony if we consider that the speaker is not being "direct" (as was discussed in 5.2.3). This strategy is very tightly related to the second one ("Give association clues"). That a speaker can be ironic by giving hints and association clues can be confirmed when analysing the following passage:

- [1] <<Men who allow their love of power to give them a distorted view of the world are to be found in every asylum: one man will think he is the Governor of the Bank of England, another will think he is the King, and yet another will think he is God. Highly similar delusions, if expressed by educated men in obscure language, lead to professorships of Philosophy; and if expressed by emotional men in eloquent language lead to dictatorships>>.

(BR, 1958: 25)

Russell is giving association clues and consequently giving hints to the reader, who, by making comparisons, will be led to the conclusion that professors of Philosophy and dictators are lunatics. This strategy constitutes an indirect criticism, which displays ironic intentions on the part of Russell, who tries to show how close to lunacy dictators and philosophers are, in spite of the fact that they try to hide this situation, be it by means of either "obscure" or "eloquent" language. There is an implied contrast between "apparently sane" people and "apparently mad" people, stressing the fact that we may be deceived by appearances.

The third off record strategy in the chart (Presuppose) can also be used for ironic purposes. Brown & Levinson admit

that in their example:

"I washed the car again today" (1987: 217)

the word "again" presupposes that he has washed the car before, and this in an appropriate context (when S and H have agreed to share the task) "may implicate a criticism" (1987: 217). The same holds for their other example:

"At least 'I don't go around boasting about 'my achievements" (1987: 217)

where the contrastive stress on "I" and "my", together with the phrase "at least" presuppose that someone does or did go around boasting, and, consequently, it can be said to be ironical, considering it is an indirect criticism in which there is an implied contrast.

To take an example from the corpus, consider the presupposition implied in Dorothy's ironic question:

[2] (Blanche enters, wearing light jacket)

Blanche: Ohh, here you all are.

Dorothy: How'd your physical go?

Blanche: Oh, just fine. The doctor could not believe it when I told him my age.

Dorothy: Why, what age did you tell him?

(GG, 1991: 175)

The final question, and especially the words "what age", presuppose that Blanche may well have lied to the doctor with respect to her age. It also shows an ironical criticism against Blanche, implicating that she certainly looks her age, but that only in the case that she lied could the doctor have made such

a remark (that she did not look her age). The irony also lies in the implied contrast between her real age and the age she told the doctor she was.

Another example of ironic presupposition is found again in Dorothy's words when talking to Blanche after she comes back from hospital:

[3] Blanche: I am not back to my old self. As a matter of fact, I may never be.

Dorothy: What are you talking about, Blanche?

Blanche: Listen, I know this sounds crazy, and if it hadn't happened to me I wouldn't believe it either, but while I was being operated on, I had an out-of-body experience! I was... floating... looking down at myself. I -it was like... it was like...

Dorothy: What, the mirror on your bedroom ceiling?

(GG, 1991: 182)

The determiner "your" in Dorothy's final rhetorical question presupposes that Blanche has a mirror on her bedroom ceiling, which indirectly constitutes a "hint" about her bedroom habits. Dorothy is again being sarcastic and trying to implicate that these habits are not very "decent".

It has already been shown (briefly) in this study (see 5.2.2) that irony can also be conveyed by means of understatement (a way of generating implicatures by saying less than is required) or overstatement (a way of generating implicatures by saying more than necessary, i.e. exaggerating or choosing a point on a scale which is higher than is warranted by the actual state of affairs). These are strategies 4 and 5 in the off record chart. I shall enlarge the data given by providing two more



examples from the corpora, the first of which is an instance of understatement and the second of which is an instance of overstatement. In the first one, two academics are criticising the changing character of the Head of Department. They have previously said that he is a moody person and that, one day, he has great arguments with somebody about something, and, the next day, he expounds that person's views as his own with great conviction, never admitting he was wrong. B understates by hedging on the amount of criticism he is willing to make with such expressions as "a bit" or "in a way", which, together with their laughter (and the falling-rising intonation given to key words) also allow for an ironic interpretation:

[4]

B	11	*((but . ^that !is only :n\atural#))*	/
(A	11	a ^ra*ther 'weak ch\aracter#	/
A	11	^d\oesn't it#	/
B	11	^m\ay'be#	/
B	20	*((untranscribable murmur))*	/
A	11	*^not 'quite b\ig e'nough#	/
A	11	to ^go* and 'say l\ook old 'chap#	/
A	11	^y\ou were r/ight# -	/
A	11	or per^haps not _even _big e_nough _to .	/
A	11	r\ecog'nize#	/
B	11	I ^got the im:pr\ession#	/
B	11	that he ^didn't !r\ecog'nize it# .	/
A	11	^n\o#	/
A	11	*^pr\obably#*	/
B	12	*^that '[@:](([m]))* - he ^just di!g\ested the	/
B	12	'id/eas#	/
B	11	and ^then _came _out with _them _quite	/
B	11	spont_aneously and without re!fl\ection#	/
B	21	*((but it's a) ^bit*	/
A	11	*^[m]#*	/
(B	11	d/\ifficult#	/
B	11	in a ^w\ay# -	/
B	11	that a ^person could be "!s\o unre"fl/ective#	/
B	11	as ^not to _r/\ealize#	/
B	11	that he'd ^ch\anged his m/ind#	/
B	20	*(- laughs)*	/

(LLC, S.1.6.)

The hedges "a bit" and "in a way" are here used in order to ironically soften or minimise the ironic fact that the Head of Department first argues against another person's idea and then uses that idea as if it were his. Thus, in this example there is a display of the two main kinds of irony: *verbal* and *situational*. It can be said that the speaker is verbally ironic because he uses linguistic hedges like "a bit" or "in a way" when he, in fact, means that it is very difficult to understand that a person could be so contradictory. In addition, there is situational irony precisely in this contradictory nature of the person that is being criticised.

The second example is one in which exaggeration (overstatement) is used with ironic purposes:

[5] Blanche: I've decided I can handle this relationship. I'm going out with Dirk Saturday night.

Dorothy: Was it ever in doubt?

Blanche: Momentarily. This is strictly off the record, but Dirk is nearly five years younger than I am.

Dorothy: In what, Blanche? Dog years??

(GG, 1991: 65)

This is one more instance showing Dorothy's aggressiveness towards Blanche by being sarcastic and again implying that Blanche is a liar. Dorothy wants to say that Dirk is certainly much younger than what Blanche asserts he is, and she achieves this effect by making a question that displays exaggeration and pungent criticism.

I have not found examples in the corpus of strategy n°6

("use tautologies"), but I have heard ironic speakers use tautologies and do it for their ironic purposes. The example that comes to my mind is one in which echoic irony is used: An American (academic) friend of mine was having a conversation with a British professor. My friend praising the "American way of life", saying that America was a land of freedom and opportunity, etc., and he concluded his turn by saying:

"America, my dear professor, is America."

with which he meant that America was a unique country in which all the perfection in the world had been concentrated. Later on, these two same people were watching the news on television, and after a succession of horrible pieces of news showing crime and misery in the U.S.A, the British professor "took revenge" and said:

"America is America, my dear friend."

The professor was evidently using the tautology in an ironic way to mean exactly the opposite my friend intended to mean in his previous and analogous comment. He tried to tell the American academic that his country was not so perfect as he thought it was, and the echoic repetition of his previous tautological remark seemed to be the perfect tool for doing it.

"Use contradictions" (strategy n° 7 in the chart) belongs in the same group as "Be ironic", and, since contradiction appears to be an intrinsic feature of irony, it can be said that these two strategies always work together. Although not all contradictions are ironic, it appears to be a fact that in all ironies a contradiction of some kind is implied. This has

been amply discussed throughout this dissertation, and, therefore, I consider it unnecessary to present examples here, since all the examples of verbal irony displayed hitherto show the working of implicit contradictions.

Ironical effects can also be achieved by means of a metaphor (strategy n°9). For example, one could ironically criticise a singer one considers to be bad by saying: "He's a nightingale!". Similarly, in the following dialogue from the *London Lund Corpus*, A refers ironically to the Board of the Faculty as a "Supreme Soviet" (a metaphor that is hedged by the particle "sort of"), after some mild criticisms concerning academic structure and its bureaucracy:

[7]

B	21	3^I	/
A	11	3*^[m]##	/
(B	21	3thought that you were on this [m] -	/
A	11	3^n\o# -	/
B	11	3^faculty board repre:s\entative ((2 to 3 sylls# -	/
B	11	3what^ever you c\all it#) .	/
A	11	3no [dh @] it's ^(c\alled) . board of the	/
A	11	3f\aculty# *-*	/
B	11	3*^[=mhm]##	/
(A	11	3you ^s=ee#	/
A	11	3we ^we . are members of the :faculty of \arts	/
A	11	3{*of* the uni^v/ersity#)# -	/
B	11	3*((^y/es#))*	/
(A	11	3^but . [dhi] . !faculty of \arts# .	/
A	11	3^has . [e:] a sort of - su\preme s\oviet# .	/
A	21	3*.* . which is	/
B	11	3*^[/mhm]##	/
(A	11	3called the "^\board of the _faculty#	/
B	11	3^y\es#	/

(LLC, S.1.2.)

Asking a question with no intention of obtaining an answer (Strategy n° 10: "Use rhetorical questions) may also be

a strategy to convey ironic meanings. Brown & Levinson point out that to ask such a kind of question is "to break a sincerity condition on questions, namely, that S wants H to provide him with the indicated information" (1987: 223). They later on note that questions that leave their implicated answers hanging in the air may be used to make criticisms and thus can be mixed with irony (1987: 223). The possibility of using questions to be ironic has already been discussed in different points of this paper. I shall here present one more humorous example, in which the Minister's wife makes another of her pungent, ironical, rhetorical questions. The Minister was trying to explain to his wife that he had to set the example for the "Economy Drive" policy he was trying to carry out. He had cut down on furniture, cars and any kind of privilege he had as a Minister, and so, that day, he walked home from work. The wife complained about it, because he got home very late (as a consequence of going on foot):

[8] Hacker: Oh, darling; you don't really understand politics, do you? This way is going to bring me much more power in the end.

wife: Darling, and how are you going to travel when you're Prime Minister, hitch-hike?

(YM, 1994 Video Episode: *The Economy Drive*)

The rhetorical question is evidently showing the wife's annoyance at her husband's crazy policies, and she is at the same time mocking him and manifesting contempt towards his ideas. She uses sarcastic irony and tries to pinpoint the ridiculous situation

brought about by her husband's policies by exaggerating the next step to be taken by him: indeed, the image of a Prime Minister hitch-hiking on his way to work every day appears as ridiculous and ironic.

It has already been stated and discussed (see 5.2.4) that most instances of verbal irony seem to display some kind of ambiguity (strategy n° 11). Likewise, one may be vague or may overgeneralise (strategies 12 and 13) when being ironic. The examples given by Brown & Levinson illustrating these two strategies could also be interpreted as ironical in some particular situations. Example n° 81 (in which the speaker is vague) could, in a given context, be taken as an indirect criticism and reproach (for example, uttered by a person who is tired of his/her friend's addiction to alcohol):

(81) "Looks like someone may have had too much to drink."  
(1987: 226)

Similarly, example 86 (illustrating over-generalization) could be used ironically to implicate "You're not mature" and/or "You should help me and you're not doing it":

(86) "Mature people sometimes help do the dishes." (1987: 226)

An example (from the LLC) illustrating these last two strategies is found in the words of two professors (A and B) who are interviewing a prospective undergraduate (C), and who, after learning that she does not know enough English Literature (the programme she wants to start) to meet the requirements for admission, are vague and generalise in order to implicate that she does not know anything:

[9]

a 20 2now we can't set up lecture courses and talk about /  
 a 20 2simple history or indeed even the simple history of /  
 a 20 2English literature we will compare a a play written /  
 a 20 2in the Restoration Period [ @m ] with something that /  
 a 20 2happened in Elizabethan times and we assume that /  
 a 20 2our students are knowing what we are talking about /  
 a 20 2you \*see\* /  
 B 11 2\*and\* we ^\also ass/ume# /  
 B 11 2that they ^kn\ow that# /  
 B 11 2^M\arlowe# /  
 B 11 2was ^writing be'fore !Sh\akespeare# - /  
 B 11 2not \*^\after\*# /  
 a 20 2\*before\* you see very impor\*\*tant\*\* /  
 B 11 2\*\*^y\es#\*\* /  
 A 11 2^w\ell# . /  
 A 11 2I ^know it's a . !dr\awback# /  
 A 11 2^but in 'fact I !h\aven't 'been# - /  
 A 11 2^r\eading m/uch# . /

(LLC, S.3.1.)

By saying "our students" and "they", the professors are overgeneralising and being vague: they do not specify whether she is included in that group or not, so as not to be rude and tell her directly that she has no idea of what she is talking about. She certainly "catches" the message, for she readily admits that she has not been reading much, which shows the success of the ironical effect intended by the professors.

It is also possible to ironically "displace H" (strategy n° 14). Brown & Levinson describe this strategy as one in which the speaker goes off record as to who the target of his/her FTA is, or he may pretend to address the FTA to someone whom it would not threaten, and hope that the real target will see that the FTA is aimed at him/her. This seems to be the case in the following scene from *The Golden Girls*, where Blanche, Dorothy and Rose are in a demonstration, and Dorothy criticises

Rose's speech in an ironical way. They do not speak directly to Rose, though she can hear them:

[10] Rose: (into megaphone) All creatures must learn to coexist. Back where I come from, they do. That's why the brown bear and the field mouse can share their lives and live in harmony. 'course, they can't mate or the mice would explode. You know what I mean,

Dorothy (to Blanche): I think Rose needs to work on her metaphors.

(GG, 1991: 95)

Dorothy is indirectly saying that Rose's metaphor was awful. She uses the hedge "I think" and minimises or softens the criticism by saying that "she has to work on her metaphors" when, in fact, what she means is that, once more, Rose is showing signs of having low intellectual capacities.

The last off record strategy in the chart, "Be incomplete, use ellipsis", may also be mixed with irony. Sometimes a speaker may be incomplete by placing strategical silence or pauses in his discourse and thus leave the ironic implicature "hanging in the air". For instance, I have observed that, in American English, it has become a "cliché" to say:

"With friends like this, who needs enemies?"

whenever a friend has shown that s/he is not a good friend at all. Hence, sometimes the last part of the question is ellipted and the speaker is perceived as ironic without completing it ("With friends like this..."). Corpus examples of this strategy will be given and analysed in more detail in 6.3.4, where silence and pauses are viewed as possible prosodic features accompanying



irony.

In many cases, more than two of these off record strategies can work together, as can be seen from an analysis of many of the examples given. In the following passage, there is a combination of "irony", "overgeneralisation", "giving association clues" and "being vague or ambiguous":

[11] Sophia: I don't care if you're paying for dinner. What you want to do is crazy.

Martha: It's time to go, Sophia. I don't want to see another Monday. I don't want to wait and end up going like Lydia. I'm going to decide when it's over.

Sophia: I always thought somebody named God did that...

(GG, 1991: 113)

Sophia's final remark is an indirect criticism of Martha's decision to commit suicide. By overgeneralising, being vague and giving some association clues, she is avoiding the direct criticism which would perhaps be something like: "You are completely crazy for having such an irresponsible attitude".

Having shown the possibility of combination of all the off record strategies (in Brown & Levinson's chart) with irony, I now turn to the final issue in this chapter, namely, the influence of P, D and R (the sociological variables) upon both the choice to be ironic and -once this possibility has been chosen- the choice of the ironic substrategy.

5.5 Irony and the sociological variables P, D and R

Brown & Levinson argue that the assessment of the seriousness of an FTA involves the following factors:

- 1- The "social distance" (D) of S and H (a symmetric relation);
- 2- the relative "power" (P) of S and H (an asymmetric relation);
- 3- the absolute "ranking" (R) of impositions in the particular culture.

(1987: 74)

If irony is a strategy used to do FTA's, it is logical to think that its use or non-use can be affected or influenced by these variables. The seriousness or weightiness of a particular FTA is compounded of both risk to S's face and risk to H's face, in a proportion relative to the nature of the FTA. The following formula is given by Brown & Levinson to calculate the weightiness of an FTA:

$$Wx = D (S,H) + P (H,S) + Rx$$

where D is a symmetric social dimension of similarity/difference within which S and H stand for the purposes of this act. P is an asymmetric social dimension of relative power, i.e., P (H,S) is the degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S's plan and self-evaluation. R is a culturally and situationally defined ranking of impositions by the degree to which they are considered to interfere with the agent's wants of self-determination or of approval (his negative and positive face wants). (1987: 76-7)

According to Brown & Levinson, going off record (and, consequently, also being ironic) is one of the least risky strategies: the more an act threatens S's or H's face, the more

S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy, because these strategies afford payoffs of increasingly minimised risk. Then the explanation for irony within this framework would be (in the case of Negative Irony, for this is the only type they take into account) that, given that the speaker/writer wants to criticise somebody or something, he chooses to do it in an off record way by virtue of the fact that this strategy offers more security and less risk of face loss. I have observed, however, in the corpus as well as in my everyday experience, that many times hearers can be offended by ironical remarks, giving evidence that this rule does not always work. There may be persons or even whole cultures that consider being indirect and ironic a ruder behaviour (and, therefore, a more threatening one) than simply going baldly on record (indeed, in our Western culture, sometimes it is considered more valuable to be "frank" or "open" than to be indirect and obscure).

Nor does this rule seem to work for cases of Positive Irony, for, why should a person choose the strategy of criticism to convey praise when it is more risky to do so? (It seems, indeed, to be more risky, since, given its off record quality it could be open to misinterpretation and ambiguity, and then someone could interpret it literally (as a criticism instead of praise). This, I believe, can partially be explained by the thesis put forward above, that off record and on record strategies can combine in order to create more intricate and subtler strategies that convey equally intricate and subtle meanings such as those labelled as "ironic". It can also be

explained by means of the working and influence of the sociological variables P, D and R. The weaving net of variables does not seem to be simple, and, consequently, "general rules" like the one discussed here do not hold valid for some cases, and, therefore, they should be worked out in a more detailed and careful way.

I shall thus proceed to discuss each of the sociological variables, first separately, and then together, in relation to the corpora examples I am using for this investigation.

#### 5.5.1 Distance

Diane Blakemore states that "by leaving his attitude implicit, the speaker/writer of an ironic utterance conveys a suggestion of complicity" (1992: 170). Sperber (1974) makes a similar statement. This idea would suggest that when a speaker chooses to be ironic, it is because s/he estimates that the distance between him/her and the hearer is relatively small (they are "accomplices"). But, in spite of what Sperber and later on Blakemore said, I have noticed that it can also happen that verbal irony be chosen on occasions in which the factor of distance is higher, precisely because of the aforementioned risk-minimising payoffs. It looks like a paradox, then, that the ratios "the higher the distance, the higher the probability of using verbal irony as a strategy" and "the lower the distance, the higher the probability of using verbal irony as a strategy"

could both be true. But, in fact, these statements reflect the relativity and context-dependency of the phenomenon of irony. In some particular situations, one of the statements will be valid; in some others, the other one will be considered as valid, and this validity seems to depend on two main factors:

a) whether the irony is aimed at the hearer or at a third party (see Fig 1 in 5.3.3) and b) whether the irony is positive or negative. In the sarcastic irony found in *The Golden Girls*, for example, the distance value among the four women is rather low, considering the facts that they are all friends, they live in the same house, and, consequently the relationship among them is a very close one. Most of the irony used by the "girls" (and specially by Dorothy) is of the Negative kind: they have a great tendency towards making witty, pungent and criticising comments of one another. Most cases could then be labelled as "Negative irony directed to the hearer". This seems to confirm the hypothesis that "familiarity is more permissive" with verbal irony. The same but also the opposite (paradoxically and ironically) could be said of the "*Yes Minister*" series: on the one hand, we find bitter and frequent irony on the part of the Minister's wife (when addressing the Minister), which shows how common it may be among closely related people. But, on the other hand, we find equally bitter irony in Humphrey's comments (Humphrey is the Minister's Secretary) and, here, the D value is much higher than in the case of the wife. In the case of Humphrey, it could be said that he uses irony to minimise his face risk when criticising the Minister, something he would not

be allowed to do in a direct way.

As regards the examples taken from Bertrand Russell's argumentative prose, it is important to distinguish between a) the targets of his irony and b) the readers of his irony. The distance between him and his readers can be estimated as low, since his readers become his accomplices in criticising the targets of his irony (a third party that can be society, religion, the government, etc.). Then the distance between him and his targets appears to have a higher value. Consequently, the ratio adopted for these cases of verbal irony will vary, depending on whether we take into account his readers or the "victims" of his irony. I do not disregard the possibility of the readers and the victims being the same people in some particular cases, in which case the readers would not be Russell's accomplices and would feel attacked. But, in general, Russell uses the third person in his sarcastic comments, which at least gives the impression that his attack is not directed to the second person (the readers, in this case).

David Kaufer (1977) emphasises the importance of a reader's having knowledge of the author's beliefs as a requisite step in assessing whether a particular discourse is ironical or not. As an illustrating example, he quotes this passage from *Huckleberry Finn* (chapter 32), in which the implication of the last statement is that "niggers" are not people:

- Good Gracious! Anybody hurt?
- No'm. Killed a nigger.
- Well, it's lucky: because sometimes people do get hurt!

(1959: 216)

Kaufer thus argues that, if we assume that Mark Twain is a racist, then we have no reason to believe he is being ironic in having a character speak this way. But, if we assume that he is not a racist, we can explain this remark as Twain's way of attacking this character. In the case of Russell, something similar occurs, for it also seems logical to assert that it is easier to understand his sarcastic irony if one knows, for example, that he had liberal ideas and was an agnostic. The conclusion to this is, then, that the shorter the distance between speaker and hearer or writer and reader, the higher the probability of comprehension of the irony conveyed.

As regards the examples taken from the *London Lund Corpus* and those in the newspaper articles, I can not make generalisations in terms of D or any of the sociological variables, since, in the case of the LLC, they belong to different texts in which different contextual factors are found, and, in the case of the newspaper articles, they are different pieces of journalistic writing written by different authors about different topics. Consequently there are different values for the P, D and R variables in each particular case. I shall try to analyse these variables in the actual examples from the LLC and from the other sources used in this investigation in section 5.5.4, after discussing, in a general way, the other two sociological variables, namely, *Power* and *Ranking of imposition* of the particular culture.

### 5.5.2 Power

Considering now the P variable, it seems that a paradox takes place again: it can be logically supposed that a person in power could make great use of irony in order to bitterly criticise whatever or whoever s/he considers to deserve such criticism. This may be the case of Bertrand Russell's ironic attacks, for he was a person in power in the sense that he had moral and academic authority to be able to and to dare make such criticisms.

On the other hand, it could also be the case that a person uses irony in order to avoid on record criticism (and, therefore, avoid certain responsibility and face loss) of a superior or person in power, as seems to be the case with Humphrey's ironic discourse in the *"Yes, Minister"* series.

According to the results of four experiments conducted by Thomas Holtgraves (1994), the Power of the speaker influences even the comprehension of the hearer, for one of the conclusions of these experiments was that, when the speaker was higher in status than the hearer, the comprehension of indirect requests was quicker than when the interactants were equal in status. This could, perhaps, mean that persons in power are expected and allowed to use indirect strategies with people having a lower social or professional rank, and this could be one reason for people in power to be ironic.

Interestingly, the knowledge of the exact value of the P variable may make the hearer decide whether an utterance is



ironic or not. Lakoff (1972) notes that a superior may address an obvious inferior (e.g. in the army) by saying "Come in" with no sense of sarcasm. But if an officer addresses a private by saying: "Come in, won't you?", he is necessarily being sarcastic. Similarly, whereas the use of please prefacing an imperative is a "mark of politeness", its use by an Army officer to his privates would be interpretable as sarcastic (1972: 911).

Studies by Holmes (1984), Preisler (1986) and Smith Hefner (1988) demonstrate that greater politeness investment does not necessarily encode lack of power in conversational interaction. This could explain the fact that, sometimes, a person in power uses negative politeness strategies to be ironic, as has been shown in 5.3.

Harris (1995) argues that "truth" comes to be defined pragmatically as what is accepted explicitly as shared knowledge, and, in her study, she observed that powerful institutional members move from the "given" to the "new", which is often "disputable", by a variety of communicative strategies which the less powerful "clients" find difficult to challenge (1995: 117). This would mean that powerful people are to some extent entitled to change what is considered as "true" by the sole virtue of their authority and power, and it does not seem illogical for this to have consequences in their use of irony.

Johnson (1992) writes about the use of hedges with Positive Politeness with the purpose of diminishing the power of the speaker. Hedges like "I find", "I believe", etc., could be used to mitigate the claim to knowledge of the speaker, and, as

knowledge is an aspect of power, they could also mitigate his power. It would be interesting to investigate whether this can also happen when hedges are used in ironic utterances.

### 5.5.3 Ranking of imposition of the particular culture

The R variable may also affect the decision to choose irony as a strategy. For instance, there are certain situations in everyday life in which irony seems to be more accepted and expected than in others. One would not expect, for example, a fitness instructor to be ironic when giving instructions as to how to do the exercises. On the other hand, irony towards the opponent party is expected and enjoyed by people in general when listening to the politicians' speeches in their election campaigns.

As was noted in 3.3, Booth (1974) observes that irony seems to be used, at least in oral form, in all cultures, for he has been unable to find anyone from any land who could not think of examples from his own people, and he even notes that, in some cultures, some ironies are firmly built into the usual terms for things (e.g., as quoted in 3.3, in Western American, tall men are nicknamed "Shorty", or, in one part of India, a blind man is called "man with a thousand eyes") in which case we could speak of "conventionalised irony" (see 3.3).

I have already mentioned some cultures in which a kind of irony used with positive politeness is part of the ritual of some groups (e.g.: the "ritual insults" of black adolescents in

New York, the teasing relationships of some black tribes in Africa, or the "flyting" of joking relationships in some English dialects). In these cases, the R variable becomes of utter importance, since the same kind of language used in another culture or sub-culture, or with other people, would by no means be interpreted as ironic and could lead to catastrophic results.

As is the case with P and D, R is also decisive in many instances for the assessment or the labelling of a given utterance as "ironic". Blum Kulka (1990) writes about the notions of "sincerity" and "truthfulness" in the Chinese culture, and notes that, for instance, a Chinese hostess will claim "there is nothing to eat" even after laying ten different dishes before her guests (1990: 262). Here, actual truthfulness is waived in service of what Leach (1983) called "the principle of polite modesty". Hence, in this case, we could not label the hostess's utterance as ironic: her purpose is to be perceived by her guests as a modest person, and, consequently, an ironic interpretation seems to have very little sense here.

In the study mentioned above, Blum-Kulka concludes that culture interferes in the amount of direct and/or indirect politeness strategies people use in family discourse. This would imply that the frequency in the use of irony (an indirect, off record strategy) will also vary according to the culture. I do not intend to prove this hypothesis here, but it appears as a fertile area for further research.

The incidence of the D, P, and R variables upon the use of irony can be, in itself, a topic for a whole thesis or

dissertation. I do not intend it to be the main topic in this dissertation, but I shall try to introduce some research on the problem (that can be extended in future investigation) by means of the analysis of some of the corpus examples. I now turn to them.

#### 5.5.4 D, P and R as viewed in some examples in the corpora

An example of a situation where the speaker has power over the hearer and uses irony to criticise her can be found in example [9] in the previous section (5.5.3), in which two professors are "attacking" a prospective student for not having the required knowledge to enter University as a graduate student. This example was presented as a case where the off record strategy of "overgeneralisation" is used together with irony. By saying: "we assume that our students are knowing what we are talking about, you see", the professor tries to mitigate the fact that, contrary to their assumptions, this student did not know what she was talking about. Evidently, his condition as professor gives him authority to say this, and so it can be concluded that he is ironic because he is powerful (if the student's interlocutor were another student, the probability of occurrence of this particular use of irony would be lower). But at the same time, these professors try to "mitigate" the criticism by overgeneralising and by using hedges like "we assume" which could be interpreted (as Johnson (1992) notes) as an intention on the part of the speakers not to be rude and, in

that way, diminish their power to a certain extent. In spite of this possibility, it still can be said that the P value is high for the speakers. The D value is also high, considering the fact that this is the first time they have met and that the relationship is that of professor-student. As regards R, it seems to me that, in our Western society, teachers are better allowed to criticise students face to face (both in an on record and in an off record way) than students are allowed to criticise teachers in the same overt manner. When a student and a teacher are face to face, it is more face threatening for the student to criticise the teacher than vice versa. It is different when the criticism is not made face to face, in which case it seems that students feel they can do it freely ( e.g., when two students criticise an absent teacher).

The formula for this first example of irony in the section seems then to be the following:

$$[1] \quad hP (S,H) + hD + lR$$

where:

hP (S,H) = high power of the speakers (the professors) with respect to the hearer (the student);

hD = high distance among interlocutors;

lR = low ranking of imposition of the culture on the speaker, since his act is not highly face-threatening.

This example shows that the power variable affects the value of the R variable, for the ratio "the greater the power, the smaller the face threat of the speaker and, consequently, the R value" seems to work.

Consider now example 3 in section 5.3.2, in which A

uses positive irony by saying to B (who is a computer programmer) that Malcolm (the man at the computer unit) "could help B if he got stuck". Both A and B are academics who now work together in the same department. A is a woman aged 45 and B is a man aged 28. Neither of them seems to have power over the other, they are colleagues and are engaged in friendly conversation; therefore, A tries to show his friendliness at a particular moment by uttering a sentence whose presupposition is intended to be understood as ironic; i.e., "if you got stuck" presupposes that B might get stuck, but A wants to mean the opposite, for considering B is a computer programmer, it is very unlikely that he would get stuck or that he would need any help from anyone with computers. It is a way of telling B something like: "I know that you know a great deal about computers", with which she is addressing B's positive face. The D value is low, then, considering they are colleagues. A's utterance does not try to interfere with B's wants of self-determination or approval; on the contrary, A is making an expenditure of "goods", i.e., an expression of regard for B's positive face. The imposition of the culture can be said to be low, for -other things being equal- colleagues are generally expected to be in good terms with one another and, therefore, there is a general assumption about trying to keep each one's positive face, which, by way of praising, does not seem to be highly risky. The combination of the sociological variables for this particular example would therefore be:



values of the sociological variables should be estimated for both relationships. In this particular instance, if we consider that Russell's addressees (his readers) are "his accomplices" and not his victims, then the D between him and his readers has a low value, whereas that between him and his victims is high.

As regards the P variable, Russell here can be considered as more powerful than both his readers and his victims. He has the power of knowledge, of being a prestigious mathematician, thinker and philosopher, and, as such, he can write a book, express his ideas and influence many people with them.

With respect to the R value, it seems reasonable to think that it was rather risky to dare criticise the church and religion at the time he was writing his works (early 20th century), for religion also had great power, and it was not easy to attack it in such a way. Then, the ranking of imposition of the culture at that time could be considered high if we take into account the risks a person was running when daring criticise such an institution as the church. Therefore, the combination of variables for this particular instance (and for many of the Russell examples) is:

$$\begin{array}{l} [3] \quad hD (V) \\ \quad \quad \quad + hP \quad + hR \\ \quad \quad \quad lD (R) \end{array}$$

where:

hD (V) = high distance between ironist and victims of irony  
lD (R) = low distance between ironist and readers  
hP = high power of writer/ironist  
hR = high ranking of imposition of the culture upon not doing the  
FTA



In the following example from *The Golden Girls*, Sophia uses her authority as the oldest of the "girls" to be sarcastic towards Blanche. As has been noted in some of the examples discussed in this work, Blanche has a reputation for having ample experience with men, and, therefore, she's being constantly attacked by her roommates, especially by Dorothy and Sophia:

[4] Blanche: Rose, what were you doing out so early this morning?

Rose: Well, I couldn't sleep, so I went for a spin last night -to Alabama. Blanche, do you know at a truck stop in Tuscaloosa they have an egg dish named after you?

Blanche: Really? How are they prepared?

Sophia: Over easy.

(GG, 1991: 205)

Sophia uses here the strategy of "giving association clues" in order to be ironic and implicate that Blanche is "easy with men". Sophia has a certain power over the girls by virtue of being the oldest of the four, and so her bitter criticisms are generally expected and accepted, no matter how much the other girls like them or not. The D value is here quite low, considering the fact that the girls are friends and live in the same house, as a family. The P variable seems, again, to influence the R value, since the fact of being more powerful (in age and experience) appears to make the act less threatening, i.e. our society is more permissive with old people and their opinions are generally respected (albeit not always shared). The combination is thus:

[4] hP (S,H) + 1D + 1R

where:

hP (S,H) = high power of speaker with respect to hearer/s  
lD = low distance value among speakers  
lR = low ranking of imposition of the culture as to doing or not  
doing the FTA.

It is interesting to note here that the two characters of the series that use irony with greater frequency are the two characters that have more power in a certain respect. As has been said, Sophia has the power of experience and old age. Dorothy (the other ironist of the series) has the power of knowledge and education. Dorothy is the most educated of the four girls; she is a high school teacher, and the three other girls look up to her as the most intelligent in the group. She, therefore, feels entitled to make pungent criticisms that many times give evidence of the other girls' ignorance or lack of cleverness in many respects, and, indeed, this is one of the most common effects of verbal irony: the ironist is seen as a witty, intelligent human being that mocks at other not-so-intelligent human beings.

Finally, I shall analyse one more example from the "Yes, Minister" video episodes. We have already seen that the Minister's wife makes use of sarcasm or irony in general to show her disagreement or discontent with some of her husband's attitudes after having become the Minister of Administrative Affairs. One instance is the following:

- [5] Hacker: You're very tense.  
wife: Oh, No! I'm not tense. I'm just a politician's wife.  
I'm not likely to have feelings. A happy, carefree,  
politician's wife.  
(YM, 1994 Video episode: "Open Government")

Evidently, the wife has power over the Minister simply because she is his wife, and, consequently, she can use as much Negative Irony as she wants in order to criticise and influence him with her feelings and thoughts. The D value is, on the contrary, very low, given the kind of relationship (wedlock) between both interlocutors. The R value also appears to be low, for being ironic towards one's husband does not seem to be extremely face threatening in our culture; in fact, many times irony is used among couples or families as a game and as a way of not using more direct language that in some situations would be more insulting. I am conscious of the fact that generalisations cannot be made here, though my explanation seems to serve the purposes of this example and of other possible ones.

The combination of variables for this case would then be:

$$[5] \quad hP(S,H) + 1D + 1R$$

where:

hP (S,H) = high power of speaker over hearer (in the sense that she can affect and influence her husband)

1D = low distance between interlocutors

1R = low ranking of imposition of the culture (since the FTA involved is not highly risky).

#### 5.5.5 Conclusions to section 5.5

After the analysis made of the possible value of the three sociological variables in relation to some examples in the

corpora, the context-dependency of their value seems evident. That is, no single formula or combination of the variables seems to be the formula for cases of ironic FTA's. In some contexts, the P and D values may be high and the R value low, or the P low and the D and R high, etc.. It nevertheless seems that, in cases of Negative Irony, there is a tendency for the P value of the speaker to be high, but this is only an intuition; more research should be done on the topic to be able to make generalisations. A statistical analysis of the most frequent combinations should be done in order to reach more valid conclusions as to the tendencies of ironic FTA's in this respect.

In addition, the possibility of existence of other sociological variables could be looked into, as well as the existence of other dependent variables or sub-variables of the main ones. It seems to me that, for instance, the ranking of imposition of a given culture over an FTA may be valued differently by different people (even within the same culture), or that different people perceive power and distance in a different manner, depending on, for instance, their personal background or family history (which would then be considered sub-variables).

Brown & Levinson's formula estimating the weightiness of an FTA, thus, does not seem easy to handle, for the values of the variables may vary even within the same situation and the same FTA, depending on whether we consider the speaker's power over the hearer or over a third party, the distance as seen by the speaker or as seen by the hearer, and the R value as seen

from the kind of imposition made upon the hearer or upon the speaker , and, eventually, on how each of them regards this imposition. In cases of irony in particular, all these details seem to be of utmost importance, for, as has been shown throughout this work, both speakers and hearers (and audiences or third parties, if there are any) need to understand an intricate and complex network of psychological, sociological and linguistic relationships that make it possible and "logical" to reach an ironic interpretation of the utterance or act in question. The combination of variables and the estimation of the weightiness of the FTA may well be of a more complex nature than the formula proposed by Brown & Levinson, although it has to be acknowledged that this formula captures the important fact that all three dimensions -P, D and R- contribute to the determination of the level of politeness with which an FTA is communicated.

In any case, the analysis of the examples in this section has shown that, in general terms, it can be stated that the sociological variables P, D and R influence the use of verbal irony , as hypothesis n° 10 expresses. Although no quantitative analysis is made here, I have tried to show how these variables work independently but together, in order to provide the ironic FTA with subtle shades of meaning which are crucial for its correct comprehension.

#### 5.6 General conclusions of the chapter

In this chapter, I have presented the phenomenon of

verbal irony within the framework of Politeness Theory. Although it can be said that this theory is a suitable one to analyse and view ironic language acts, it can also be said that irony is a much more complex phenomenon than it is shown to be by Brown & Levinson in their Theory of Politeness. I have tried to demonstrate that:

- a) An ironic speaker/writer can not only violate the Maxim of Quality (as Brown and Levinson claim) but also the other three Gricean Maxims (Quantity, Manner and Relevance) (Research Hypothesis n°7);
- b) an ironic speaker/writer not only makes use of off record strategies but also of on record ones (hypothesis n° 8). In cases of "conventionalised" and "implicature-free" (see 7.2.2) irony, the ironic FTA is completely on record;
- c) both Positive and Negative Politeness can be used in combination with irony, a fact that supports my claim for the existence of a negative and a positive kind of irony (Research Hypothesis n° 8);
- d) all the off record strategies presented by Brown and Levinson (1987) can be used to convey ironic meanings and very frequently two or more of them can co-occur to result in an ironic whole (Research Hypothesis n° 9);
- e) the sociological variables P, D and R are "handled" by ironic speakers/writers and "weighed" by the possible hearers so as to assess the existence or non-existence of verbal irony and the possible shades of meaning within the irony if it takes place. This aspect, however, is not scrutinised here, and,

as was anticipated, more research should be done in the future as to the most frequent possible formulas of weightiness of the ironic FTA, or as to other variables or sub-variables possibly intervening in the total weightiness as well.

All these conclusions have been reached after analysing several examples in the corpora used for this investigation.

The concept of *strategy* used by Brown & Levinson is, in my opinion, a very useful and descriptive one to understand the phenomenon in question. For that reason, I have considered the Theory of Politeness as fertile ground where verbal irony can be better comprehended and meditated upon. I believe that all cases of irony can be structured and classified around the concept of strategy, and that is what I shall try to show in the taxonomy of ironic strategies proposed in chapter 8.

After having studied and discussed this theory, as well as other theories of verbal irony in previous chapters, I thought it would be necessary to clarify the role of certain prosodic features that are generally associated with irony (e.g., ironic intonation or "tone of voice") in order to be able to give them their precise importance and place in the totality of ironic strategies and in the total ironic meaning. I shall, thus, turn to them in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: INTONATION AND OTHER PROSODIC FEATURES  
IN IRONIC DISCOURSE: A SURVEY



<<Pity the poor analyst, who has to do the best he can with meanings that are as elusive as a piece of wet soap in a bath tub.>>

Dwight Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*

<<Virginia: That was a lovely lunch, Blanche, a lovely lunch, in a lovely house with your lovely friends.

Blanche: Stop making fun of me Virginia  
Virginia: Making fun of you... Honey, I was complementing you.

Blanche: I heard the way you said "lovely".

Virginia: How did I say "lovely"?

Blanche: Oh, you know very well how you said "lovely". You said "lovely" the same way you say "lovely" to a date who's just shown up in a light blue tuxedo.>>

*The Golden Girls: Scripts*

### 6.1 Aims of the chapter

In this chapter, I present a study of intonation and other prosodic features as they occur in ironic discourse, with the aim of investigating in what way they are related to the phenomenon of irony. In other words, the focus is on how and when the speakers make use of these features as a tool or strategy to convey ironic meanings.

As it seems evident that there exists what many people refer to as "an ironic tone of voice", my secondary research

questions for this part of the study of irony are the following:

- 1) Is there any specific kind of intonation for ironic utterances in English?, or, Is there a special tone used invariably when they occur?
- 2) Is there any other kind of prosodic feature which may serve to signal or mark ironic utterances?

In order to answer these questions, I made use of the two kinds of research that D. Brown (1988) considers. First, a review of the existing literature on the topic was made, which I shall discuss and which will serve as a basis for the clarification and understanding of the problem. This would constitute what Brown calls "secondary research". But at the same time, some "primary research" was done, i.e. "a study derived from the primary source of information", which in this case is the English language. To this latter purpose, I restricted my analysis in this chapter only to the *London Lund Corpus* (LLC) because, in that corpus, intonation and other prosodic features are marked (whereas in the other corpora they are not). Since the texts analysed from this corpus and the examples of irony found in those texts are numerous, they seem to be enough for this part of my study. The intonation and prosodic features of the video programmes can also be observed, but considering that the examples in the LLC are numerous, I thought it would not be necessary to make a prosodic transcription of such programmes. As for the written source of my corpus (Bertrand Russell's prose and the newspaper articles), there was, naturally, no way of making such a transcription, though some interesting comments can and shall be made as to the prosodic interpretation on the part of their possible readers (see 6.5).

The hypothesis that I have derived from the research questions is the following (which was anticipated in the Introduction as Research Hypothesis n° 11):

<<There is no specific tone used exclusively for ironic utterances. Nevertheless, the frequency of occurrence of the different tones within ironic discourse is different from the frequency of use of these tones in non-ironic discourse. Intonation and other prosodic features (such as pitch level, laughter, etc.) work together to conform the so-called "ironic tone of voice" and the use of these features constitutes only one more of the possible strategies ironic speakers have at their disposal.>>

The texts analysed are those specified and described in the Introduction (see 1.4.1, 1)). Each of these texts is of considerable length, and although irony, being a pragmatic phenomenon, is not so easy to find as, for instance, a syntactic category, eighty six (86) occurrences of ironic utterances were identified.

An account of the different cases of irony in relation to the topics that concern us in this chapter will be made, where 86 occurrences will be equivalent to 100% of occurrences.

The objective of this survey is, then, to try to determine the degree to which a particular intonation or any other kind of prosodic prominence accompanies ironic utterances or affects their possible interpretation.

For the clear understanding of the problem studied here, it is important to bear in mind that prosodic features include not only tone-units (length, distribution and structure), tone choice, pitch, range, prominence/stress, loudness, rate, rhythmicality, pause and tension (see Crystal and Davy, 1969) but also silence and voice qualifications such as

sobs, laughter and giggles or cough, as Johns-Lewis (1986) remarks. The function of prosody seems to be primarily concerned with the semantics or pragmatics of the utterance, and therefore the speakers' conceptions of the functions of prosody seem to be in considerable accord with psycholinguistic reality. Indeed, Cutler (1983) comes to these conclusions after analysing prosodic repairs in a great number of recorded examples: she observed that prosodic repairs were issued when the speaker feared the hearer might be misled into an inappropriate interpretation of the utterance. Anomalous accent placement itself, as long as it did not carry unwanted pragmatic implications, was not corrected (1983: 91).

The opening move for this analysis will be to discuss what the researchers have found out about the different prosodic features in connection with irony and to try to check this knowledge with the data in the corpus.

## 6.2 Intonation

Many authors have studied the intonation of ironic utterances to try to find out whether a particular intonation is characteristic of irony and whether it is a necessary condition to it.

Phoneticians such as Kenneth Pike (1945) in America and Roger Kingdom in England (1958) claimed that tones had a semantic function in language. When J.D. O'Connor and G.F. Arnold wrote *Intonation of Colloquial English* (1969), it was already a well-

known fact among linguists that intonation was significant and much importance started to be given to intonation contours of utterances. Among the variety of meanings given to an utterance by using different tones, Kingdom, in *The Groundwork of English Intonation*, points out that "implicatory statements" require a Tone III (falling-rising). Kingdom defines "implicatory statements" as "statements in which the speaker intends his hearer to understand something more than the words themselves convey" (1958: 222). Irony would obviously fall within this category. Also Leech, in his *Principles of Pragmatics*, makes reference to the fall-rise tone as "an intonation often associated with indirect implicature". In effect, the rate of occurrence of this tone among ironic utterances can be said to be high (as will be shown in the results of this survey), though not exclusive of ironic discourse. For the sake of illustration, consider the following examples from the LLC, in which the falling-rising tone seems to be of high importance in the interpretation of the ironic remark: In both "chunks" of dialogue two academics (one female and the other male) are criticising their Head of Department's views on Literature and how it should be taught:

[1]

A 11 but ^n\o#  
 A 11 ^you s\ee '[@:m]# .  
 A 11 [@] ^n\o#  
 A 12 ^this is ^this is the :l\ine#  
 A 11 to ^((s\ell))#  
 A 11 ^\obviously# \*\*  
 A 11 - . ^and he 'thinks that !\I kn/ow#  
 A 11 [??] ^I'm . "!\too 'much con:cerned  
 with :w\ords# - .

A 11 ^I'm !weak on aes:th\etic as he p/uts  
it# ( - - . giggles) which ^seems  
to m/e# .  
A 11 ^quite 'quite l\ooney#  
A 11 I ^mean \*the !fact\* that 'you 'you -  
:st\udy a 'thing#  
A 11 ^d\oesn't mean to s/ay#  
A 11 you ^can't also !!f\eel it#  
B 11 \*^[=m]##\* .  
A 11 ^d\oes it# .  
B 11 ^[\m]# .  
A 11 ^b\ut#  
A 11 ^\anyway#  
A 11 ^this is \_his !l\ine#  
A 11 and ^he's st\icking 'to it#  
A 11 at the ^m\oment#  
A 11 ^till he 'changes 'next :y\ear#  
A 21 \*( - laughs)\*  
B 20 \*( - laughs)\*  
A 11 ^which I :gather is 'quite \_  
p\ossible#  
A 12 I ^th\ink 'we you ^kn\ow [:@:m]#  
A 11 ^we 'have "f/ashions#

(LLC, S.1.6)

[2]

B 11 \*((but . ^that !is only :n\atural#))\*  
A 11 a ^ra\*ther 'weak ch\aracter#  
A 11 ^d\oesn't it#  
B 11 ^m\ay'be#  
B 20 \*((untranscribable murmur))\*  
A 11 \*^not 'quite b\ig e'nough#  
A 11 to ^go\* and 'say l\ook old 'chap#  
A 11 ^y\ou were r/ight# -  
A 11 or per^haps not \_even \_big e\_nough \_to .  
A 11 r\ecog'nize#  
B 11 I ^got the im:pr\ession#  
B 11 that he ^didn't !r\ecog'nize it# .  
A 11 ^n\o#  
A 11 \*^pr\obably##\*  
B 12 \*^that '[@:](([m]))\* - he ^just dilg\ested the  
B 12 'id/eas#  
B 11 and ^then \_came \_out with \_them \_quite  
B 11 spont\_aneously and without re!fl\ection#  
B 21 \*((but it's a) ^bit\*  
A 11 \*^[ \m]##\*  
B 11 d\ifficult#  
B 11 in a ^w\ay# -  
B 11 that a ^person could be "!\s\o unre"fl/ective#  
B 11 as ^not to \_r\ealize#  
B 11 that he'd ^ch\anged his m/ind# (laughs)

(LLC, S.1.6)

Both chunks of the same dialogue present various combinations of falling and rising tones, which help identify the whole insinuating and criticising tone of the dialogue. In the first chunk, one of the key utterances is "till he changes next year", which is placed as an afterthought or after comment to "this is his line, and he's sticking to it at the moment". The fall-rise on "year" helps to stress the contrast between what the Head of Department says now (i.e. the ideas he now sticks to) and what he will think or say next year. The whole ironic insinuation is that the Head of Department has a changing mind, and, consequently, he is unstable and one cannot trust him very much. In the second chunk, the speakers continue with their criticism of the Head of Department's weak character and B is mildly ironic in his last remark ("but its a bit difficult..."). Here combinations of "rise-fall" and "fall-rise" can be observed, as well as what Kingdom (1958) called "Divided tone III" (labelled "Fall+Rise" in the LLC) in "so unreflective", with the falling part of the tone on "so" and the rising part on the second syllable of "reflective"; and in "changed his mind", with the falling part on "changed" and the rising part on "mind". Again it can be said that the falling-rising tones let the hearer understand the ironic and criticising tone of the comment. But in both examples, other prosodic features are of considerable importance, such as the laughter, the "boosting" (i.e., an increase of the pitch level), the pauses and the arrangement of tone groups -and consequently of information groups (see Halliday, 1985)-. These other features will also be taken into

account throughout this chapter.

In spite of the relatively high frequency with which the fall-rise can be encountered in the ironic utterances of the LLC (as will be shown in numbers in the result session of this chapter), it can not be said that all the cases included this tone. The following examples confirm this statement:

```
[3]  B    11  "^G/\od _((damnation))# .
      B    11  I'll "^cr\own that _bastard#
      B    11  *((be^fore I'm f\inished with him# -
      B    11  it ^used to be)) the "!\s\ame (with the*
           ^ b/\oard##)/
      B    11  as ^w/\ell# .
      A    11  *( - laughs) . ((^oh n\o#
      A    11  I could ^see you sort of !s\eething#))*
      A    11  ^wh/at#
      B    11  the ^same at the b/\oard _meetings#
      B    11  *^t/\oo you* _know#
      B    21  I mean he ^takes over
      A    11  *((^y\es#))*
      B    11  *the :whole bloody ((!th=ing#))*
      A    13  *^he ^he ^he is* :really 'God al:m\ighty#
      A    11  he ^knows \everything# - -
      B    11  ((if)) ^I !don't cr\own ((the)) b/astard#
      A    11  ( - laughs) -
```

(LLC, S.1.1)

In his final comment, A uses an ironic metaphor ("God Almighty") with a falling tone on it. A is being ironic, for he evidently does not approve of this teacher's behaviour (he previously referred to him as a bastard). Even though, according to Halliday (1985), the use of the straightforward falling tone constitutes the "unmarked" use for statements, this tone occurs very frequently within ironic utterances (see 6.4). But in this example there are other clues, namely, other prosodic features, such as laughter, the prominence given by the heavy stress on the



metaphor and other clues of the content of discourse and the context that allow for the ironic interpretation.

In other examples, the tone used is simply a rise or a combination of rise and then fall (Rise+Fall), as in the following part of a conversation between academics in which A is trying to show his scepticism as to the background of a certain teacher:

[4]

A 13 2^this ^this ^this !str\uck me#  
A 11 2as a ^kind of {/\odd) !t\itle#;\*.;  
A 11 2^you s/ee##\* .  
A 21 2[@]  
B 11 2\*^[ \m]# -  
B 11 2^[ \m]##\*  
A 11 2^recognized :teacher \*in ap:plied lingu\istics##\*  
B 11 2\*^[ \m]# .  
B 11 2^[ \m]##\*  
A 11 2- [@] . ^you kn/ow#  
A 11 2((with ap^plied in br/ackets#)) -  
A 12 2[^@:m] . ^and [@m] - :they said well :should he be  
A 12 2[@m @] :recognized as a teacher of  
A 12 2lin"!gu\istics# -  
A 11 2^so !I said :w\ell#  
A 11 2you know I ^don't know very much about what he  
A 11 2"!d/\oes# \*.\*  
A 11 2^in NF/O#  
A 21 2but I ^have no reason to  
B 11 2\*((^[ \m]#))\*  
A 11 2bel/ieve#  
A 11 2that he ^teaches lin"!gu\istics# .

(LLC, S.1.2)

In fact, A is very sceptical about the title of "teacher in Applied Linguistics", and he does not believe that the teacher in question is good or that he should be recognised as a teacher of linguistics. This can also be inferred by the rising tone A places on the word "believe" and the emphasis he puts on "linguistics" with a falling tone.

Several combinations of tones have been observed in the corpus examples. The quantification and number of occurrences of the tones, as well as their combinations with other prosodic features, will be given in section 6.4 of this chapter. I shall now continue with the discussion and literary review.

Ann Cutler (1974) underlines the importance of the intonation contours of utterances such as:

"Harry's a real genius."

to determine whether the speaker really admires Harry or thinks quite the opposite, i.e. that Harry is anything but a genius. Nevertheless, she also states that if the cues from the context are strong enough, no intonational cues are necessary at all. For instance, if two people walk into an empty bar and one of them says:

"Sure is lively here tonight!"

the utterance will be understood as ironic regardless of the intonation used (1974: 117). This seems to be a quite reasonable argument, but, what would not seem so reasonable is to suggest that the same holds for other prosodic features. What I mean is that, as we shall see later on, when intonation is not crucial, there seem to be other prosodic features that are related to irony, i.e. features the speaker makes use of in order to convey his meaning. Anne Cutler herself writes about "other features" that may serve to identify sentences spoken ironically, which are: a) nasalisation, b) slowed rate of speaking, or c) exaggerated stress applied to one of the words (1974: 117). She

also comments that, in certain dialects of English, it is possible to achieve the same effects intonation achieves by appending the words "I don't think" (with heavy stress on "don't") to a sentence uttered with ironic intent, in which case additional intonational cues are optional (1974: 117). An example could be:

"John's really handsome, I 'don't think."

In a later paper Cutler claims that the effect exercised by the intonation contour of an utterance is dependent upon the context in which the utterance occurs (1977:110), which reconfirms her previous ideas, for she explains that in the sentence:

"Looks like a really popular place"

the propositional content is negated (and therefore the utterance understood as ironic) if the speaker and audience are in the process of entering a restaurant otherwise devoid of customers, in which case the clue for ironic interpretation would be the context and not the intonation of the utterance. In effect, both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts have proved to be of major importance for irony interpretation, considering it is a pragmatic phenomenon, but this does not mean that context excludes intonation or other prosodic features. In the examples analysed in the corpus, context and prosodic features seem to be parts of the whole and work together, rather than exclude each other.

### 6.2.1 Tonicity and tone

Halliday (1967) treated intonation as a part of English

grammar, and, in doing so, he was the first to integrate it in the language as a whole. When analysing tone, Halliday notes that "the English tone system is based on an opposition between falling and rising pitch, in which falling pitch conveys certainty and rising pitch uncertainty" (1985: 281). The falling-rising tone (Tone 4 for Halliday), is, according to his view, associated with reservations and conditions, having a general sense of "there's a 'but' about it". Tone contrasts relate to the "participants" in the discourse, for they represent their attitudes to and expectations of one another on the one hand, and their assessment of what is being said on the other hand (El Menoufy, 1988).

But Halliday does not think that tone is "all there is" in the realm of intonation. He gives much importance to the heavy semantic load carried by rhythm and intonation, and he distinguishes tonicity from tone (1967, 1985). Tonicity refers to the division of utterances into tone groups that in turn serve to organise discourse into *information units*. Each information unit is organised as a pitch contour, or tone, which may be falling, rising or mixed (falling-rising or rising-falling).

The information unit is made up of two functions: *Given* and *New*, which bear a close semantic relationship to Theme-Rheme structures. According to Halliday "other things being equal, a speaker will choose the theme from within what is given and locate the focus, the climax of the New, somewhere within the Rheme" (1985: 278). But although Given+New and Theme+Rheme are related, they are not the same thing (see Halliday (1985) for

clarification), but both are speaker selected, and it is the speaker who maps one structure on to the other to relate his discourse to the context or environment.

The important point about tone groups and their information units of Given+New used in combination with thematic information is -for the purposes of this study- to show how this combination may be exploited by the speaker to produce different rhetorical effects (as being ironic, for instance). Halliday explains that the speaker can "play" with the system, and a very frequent type of linguistic game playing is "the use of the two systems to achieve complex manoeuvres of putting the other down, making him feel guilty and the like" (1985: 279). Interestingly, the example Halliday gives to illustrate this point is one which he classifies as "mildly ironic":

<<speaker1: Are you coming back into circulation?

speaker2: I didn't know I was out.

speaker1: I haven't seen you for ages.>>

(1985: 279)

Halliday explains that speaker2 recognises an attack and defends himself with mild irony. The graphic representation of how the two systems (Given/New and Theme/Rheme) work together to that effect is the following:

I	didn't know	I was	out
THEME	RHEME		
THEME		RHEME	
GIVEN			NEW

- (1) Theme: "from my angle", with "I didn't know as interpersonal metaphor for "in my estimation" plus negative  
 (2) Information: New: = contrastive out (contrasting with back) and extending back over everything except perhaps the initial I; "as I see it; I was not away, so you're wrong" (1985: 279).

This treatment of an ironic utterance opens up a wider spectrum for the analysis of "ironic intonation": it is not only the tones what we should take into account, but also the tonicity of the whole utterance and how it combines with other systems or structures. In the example given by Halliday the interaction Given+New / Theme+Rheme is very neat and clear, but I cannot say the same of the examples of irony in the LLC. In most of the cases, the irony extends to more than one information group and thus the correspondences cannot be so clearly marked, and the combinations and networks seem to be more complex, which does not mean that there is no "play" on the part of the speaker. On the contrary, the impression is that the speaker plays "too much" with these systems and in much more complex and intricate ways than Halliday's example shows. Perhaps one of the neatest examples I have found in the corpus is the following, in which the speaker is being ironic in the traditional way (and consequently, it is easy to identify the ironic proposition) by referring to a person as "dear Damian":

[1]

B 1212^I en\_joyed . I ^still re|n\ember#  
 B 1112^that !{f\irst 'arts 'thing I did) l\ast 'year#  
 A 1112it was ^[dhi: ?@m ?@m] the :K\enwood 'one#  
 A 1112^w\asn't it#  
 B 1112^n\o#  
 B 1112it was the ^one bef\ore 'that#  
 B 1112I ^think 'Robert pro'duced (\one) be:fore 'you  
 B 1112c\ame#  
 B 1112\*it ^was the !one of [@m] . !M\atjev#\*

A 1112\*^ah y\es#;- -\*;  
 A 1112"^oh y\es# .  
 A 1112^y\es#  
 A 1112+^y\es#+  
 A 1112\*\*^y\es#\*\*  
 B 1112and ^I "!!\oved 'that#  
 B 1112and +^every+body \_else was being so !st\upid a'bout/  
 B 1112it#  
 B 1112\*\*in^cluding\*\* a'gain :dear 'Dan :D\amian#  
 B 2012[@m] \*. ( - giggles)  
 A 1112\*^y/es#

(LLC, S.9.1)

In the sentence marked in bold type in the dialogue, the two structures, Given/New and Theme/Rheme, are strategically used in combination: In fact there are two information groups in it, and the ironic load is carried by the second tone group, which is like an after-comment or afterthought (irony is many times strategically used in afterthoughts). In spite of the existence of these two tone groups, it can be said that they are working together, and that the nucleus of the information group is found in the last falling tone on "Damian". The graphic representation would be something like the following, which shows how the two structures (Given/New - Theme/Rheme) are used in combination to attain the ironic effect:

/Everybody else was being so stupid about it/including dear Dan Damian

THEME	RHEME	
GIVEN	NEW	NEW
GIVEN	NEW	

The speaker has chosen "everybody else" as the Theme, i.e.: "I'm

going to say something about everybody else", and the new information he wants to give, which coincides with the Rheme, is that all these people were stupid, and what is more, that Damian was included among these stupid people. As all these people were stupid, the hearer (A) will understand that the speaker is being ironic when saying "dear". This is also part of the new information the speaker wants to convey.

Although this combination of tonicity with Theme/Rheme structures seems to be an interesting and revealing one, I shall not include its occurrences in the quantification done in 6.4, the reason being the aforementioned complexity of combinations. In addition, this work does not aim at making a thorough analysis of tonicity and/or Theme/Rheme structures. The main aim is the study of irony within a pragmatic framework, namely, the pragmatic strategies and discourse functions that speakers and listeners have at their disposal to produce and understand it. The use of prosodic features is but one more of the strategies, and, in this chapter, the intention is to make an account of some of these features (those that seem to be most prominent and important).

As a final issue within the framework of "ironic intonation", I consider it timely and appropriate to comment on Gibbs and O'Brien's findings of some psycholinguistic experimental research on irony understanding. These investigators point to the fact that "the irony of irony is that we can often recognise ironic situations and language even though we have a terrible time trying to define irony" (1991:523). As



one of the five main concluding points of their review of psycholinguistic evidence, they state that "people can easily understand sarcasm without any special intonational cues" (1991: 530). They are probably right if we think only of intonation, for, as we have seen (and the quantified data will confirm) there is not only one tone or special kind of intonation for all cases of irony. But there are other prosodic features which co-participate with intonation in most cases. Anne Cutler (1977) also notes that the primary mode in which such emotions as anger or fear are conveyed is *voice quality* rather than intonation. El-Menoufy (a disciple of Halliday's) remarks that the meaning of tone seems to be still a controversial subject, and adds that the selection of tone interacts with other intonational and non-intonational selections to produce the total meaning of utterances in discourse (1988: 4).

What seems to be essential to ironic interpretation, thus, is the existence of some prosodic features, though not necessarily all working together. To give a few examples, in a given utterance, the most prominent and important one may be intonation; in another, it may be the use of a high pitch on some key words; in another, it may be the laughter of the participants.

I shall thus proceed to discuss some of the prosodic features -other than intonation- that have proved to be present and outstanding in the ironic examples analysed in the LLC.

### 6.3 Other prosodic features

Catherine Johns-Lewis (1986) exposes the difficulties there are in defining prosody and in distinguishing intonation from other prosodic features. Crystal (1969) views intonation as:

<<a complex of features from different prosodic systems... the most central (of which) are tone, pitch range and loudness, with rhythmicality and tempo closely related.>>

(1969: 195)

But prosodic systems -for Crystal- not only include the above, but also pause and tension, voice qualifiers (i.e.: whispery, breathy, husky) and voice qualifications (i.e.: sob, laughter, giggle, cough). A definition of intonation like Crystal's presents a greater overlap with prosody than a narrow definition such as Gimson's, involving "rises and falls in pitch level" (1980: 264). In this study I have considered intonation in its narrow sense, and I shall now refer to the other features -which are not strictly rises and falls in pitch level- as *other prosodic features*.

Apart from the various prosodic features taken into account by Crystal, Johns-Lewis includes pause phenomena (frequency, duration and distribution of pauses). Silence is considered by this author to be a useful prosodic parameter which can even distinguish between types of discourse.

In analysing the different ironic utterances in the LLC, I have observed that some prosodic features tend to occur repeatedly together with irony. Stress, for example, seems to

occur repeatedly on words or phrases that are crucial for the ironic interpretation. Indeed, Tannen (1984) shows in her analysis of the conversation at a Thanksgiving dinner among friends, that heavy stress and breathy voice quality are used to exaggerate the content of utterances and, in that way, be ironic (1984: 86). Breathiness is not marked in the LLC, and, for that reason, it will not be possible to account for it in this study.

Many instances have also been found in which an increase in pitch level (not necessarily accompanied by falls or rises) occurred at strategic points in the ironic utterances. This is called "booster" by Svartvik and Quirk and is marked by means of a colon (:) before the "boosted" syllable, or by means of an exclamation mark (!) in cases of exaggerated high pitch. Tannen (1984) considers high pitch as part of expressive phonology, used in many cases to show a mocking ironic style. In some of the ironic utterances in the LLC, both a kinetic tone and an increase in pitch occur on the same syllable, as is the case with example 3 in 6.2, in which we can observe a falling tone together with a "booster" mark on the second syllable of "almighty". Both prosodic phenomena coincide or co-occur to give prominence to a key word in the ironic metaphor "God Almighty" (remember the speakers are criticising a teacher to whom they referred previously as a "bastard", and that they do not approve of his "know-it-all" attitude).

Laughter and/or giggles have proved to be other recurrent prosodic features accompanying irony. Finally and

interestingly, pauses and silence also seem to have been strategically placed by certain speakers in some of the texts to convey certain ironic meanings.

In view of all this, a study of these features in connection with the findings in the corpus becomes necessary at this point of the discussion.

### 6.3.1 Stress

As will be reported in detail in 6.4, most of the examples analysed for this survey display the use (on the part of the speaker) of stress on "key" words. The words which have been considered as "key" here are those which were judged as important for the ironic interpretation. In many cases, this stress coincides with the kinetic tone, but, in others, the kinetic tone on a given word was not enough, and the speaker considered it necessary to stress some other words which seem to have been thought of as equally important to convey the ironic meaning. The following is a clear example, in which the word "bright" is uttered with stress on it, although it is not the one containing the kinetic stress. The speaker is being ironic about the students' attitudes and feelings, and it is evident that he does not think that their feelings are "bright":

[1]

```
A 11 ^funnily e:n\/ough#
A 11 I ^made it com!pletely :v\oluntary with the
A 11 st/udents#
A 11 ^=and# -
A 11 ^I !know 'Tom and . :J\ack#
```

A 11 ^the !other 'two 'lecturers :thought it would  
A 11 !{f\old up} in ln\o 'time#  
A 11 you ^kn/ow#  
A 11 ^funnily en/ough#  
A 11 ^students !kept c\oming in and s/ayings# .  
A 11 ((can I ^do)) phil/ology 'please#  
A 11 ^you kn/ow#  
A 21 ( - laughs) ^and \*'so\* it's  
B 11 \*^[\m]##  
A 11 +gr/\owing#+  
A 11 ^rather than di!m\inishing#  
A 21 ^which  
B 11 +^[\m]##+  
B 11 \*^[mh\m]##\*  
A 11 !I ((\*!feel\* pl\eased))#  
A 11 you ^kn/ow#  
A 11 ((^this is where 1 to 2 sylls !{t\en@z}#))  
A 11 ^comes 'smack in the :(\eye) for !th\em#  
A 11 ( - laughs) that ^students ":\are interested#  
A 11 in ^l\anguage#  
A 11 but then ^Tom's re'action to :th\is /is# -  
A 11 ^[=@m]# .  
A 11 [?] well they're ^only 'trying to :d\istance  
A 11 thems/elves#  
A 11 from ^l\iterature# - .  
A 11 ^well I mean !this is com'plete h\ooey# .  
B 11 ^[\m]#  
A 11 - de^pending \_how you "!!\look on 'language# - -  
A 11 and "ath\en#  
A 11 ^he s/ays#  
A 11 you know ^literature should be ex"\_p\erenced#  
A 11 and ^not !st\udied# - .  
A 11 well ^this is !!f\ine#  
A 11 un^til you've g\ot them#  
A 11 ^writing ex"!\/ams#  
A 11 and they've ^got to 'write 'down 'these 'bright  
A 11 :f\eelings of 'theirs#  
A 11 and they ^feel 'em so d/eep#  
A 11 that they ^can't ex!pr\ess 'em#  
A 11 ( - laughs) \*^you\* kn/ow# - - -

(LLC, S.1.6.)

This same example will be analysed later on in connection with another of the prosodic features which have been detected as contributing to ironic meanings, namely "booster" or "pitch rise", for, as can be observed, stress is not the only meaningful feature occurring in this ironic utterance. Intonation, stress,

high pitch and laughter work together here to contribute to the ironic interpretation of this conversation.

Following is another example in which stress seems to be important as an irony marker:

[2]

```
A 11 ^how do you get \on with :(^Th\orpe#)#
B 11 ^((\oh))# -
B 11 ((we)) ^get on 'quite !w\ell I 'think# .
B 11 ^rare oc_casions _I s/ee 'him#
B 20 ( . giggles)
A 20 ( . giggles) - - -
```

(*LLC*, S.1.6)

Although the kinetic stress of the clause "I get on quite well" falls on the word "well", there is also stress on the word "quite" which is thus given a certain prominence and later on, after the after-comment "rare occasions I see him" can be interpreted as placed on purpose to convey quite a contrary idea; i.e., that they do not get on "so well", or to say it another way, it leaves the door open to interpret that they get on well because they hardly ever see each other, and that, if they met more often, they would probably not get on "so well".

As has already been stated, the examples in which stress seems to play an important part within the ironic meaning are numerous. For the sake of illustration, I consider that the foregoing examples are enough, and thus I shall continue the analysis and discussion of the other prosodic features that have proved to be outstanding among the ironic utterances studied in the corpus.

### 6.3.2 Increase in pitch level

As noted above, Svartvik and Quirk use the "booster" system to indicate range of pitch, which is a different thing from direction of pitch. Allan (1986) notes how a change in pitch level or "key" can change the meaning of an utterance. The example he provides is the following:

- |                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1) We gave it to our neighbours, | the Robinsons [high key] |
| 2) We gave it to our neighbours, | [mid key]                |
|                                  | the Robinsons [low key]  |

The shift to high key in 1) shows that the speaker regards it as important that "it" was given to the Robinsons. The downshift in 2) indicates that he considers this information as parenthetically and relatively unimportant (1986: 60). Brown & Levinson (1987: 72) note that in Tzeltal there is a highly conventionalised use of high pitch or falsetto, which marks polite or formal interchanges, operating as a kind of giant hedge on everything that is said, and that its use seems to release the speaker from responsibility for believing the truth of what he utters. It would not be illogical to suppose that a change in key could also be significant for cases of verbal irony. When a speaker wants to convey an ironic meaning, there may be some words or phrases that he wants to signal as "more important" by means of a shift to high pitch.

In the following chunk of dialogue (which partially coincides with the chunk presented in 6.3.1 [1]), a great deal of verbal irony can be felt and inferred from A's words. An

increase in the pitch of some key words can be observed, as it is shown by the booster symbols (: or !). The speakers (A, a female academic, and B, a male academic) are being sarcastic about the Head of Department's approach to literature:

[1]

A 11 - de^pending \_how you "!!\look on 'language# - -  
 A 11 and "^th\en#  
 A 11 ^he s/ays#  
 A 11 you know ^literature should be ex"\_p\eried#  
 A 11 and ^not !st\udied# - .  
 A 11 well ^this is !!f\ine#  
 A 11 un^til you've g\ot them#  
 A 11 ^writing ex"!\/ams#  
 A 11 and they've ^got to 'write 'down 'these 'bright  
 A 11 :f\eelings of 'theirs#  
 A 11 and they ^feel 'em so d/eep#  
 A 11 that they ^can't ex!pr\ess 'em#  
 A 11 ( - laughs) \*^you\* kn/ow# - - -  
 A 11 ^\added to \_which#  
 A 21 "^\I  
 B 11 \*^[\m]#\*  
 A 11 think#  
 A 11 it en"^c\ourages#  
 A 11 the "^(l\azy) ":st\udent#  
 A 11 to ^go to h/im#  
 A 12 and say ^I I ^s\ay#  
 A 11 ^this is ((is)) 'what they !d\o# .  
 A 11 ( - sighs) ^I !read a b\ook 'last n/ight# .  
 A 11 and it ^moved me !!s\o m/uch#  
 A 11 ^I \_can't t\alk a'bout it# - -  
 A 11 ^now !this is \_a a "lg\orgeous#  
 A 11 ^lazy \_way \out#  
 A 11 ^you !!s/ee#  
 A 11 ^he's t/aken \in 'by th/is#  
 A 11 ^dear \_s/oul#  
 A 21 ( - laughs) a\*^bid\*ing  
 B 20 \*[m]\* \*\*(- coughs)\*\*  
 A 11 'faith in \*\*'English !!l\it\*\*erature#  
 A 11 ^y\ou kn/ow#

(LLC, S.1.6)

The whole comment has an ironic tone, but there are three parts of it that seem to carry the main ironic load. The first one is when A says that the students' feelings are "bright" and that



"they feel them so deep that they can't express them". Here we notice there is an increase of pitch before the first syllable of "feelings" and the second syllable of "express". In both cases the syllable in question bears a kinetic tone as well. It is clearly understood here that A does not think the students' feelings are bright and, even more, that they cannot have any feelings at all (and probably this is the reason for the booster and the falling rising tone on "feelings") since A believes they are lazy and will tend not to read any books if the teacher has such "crazy" ideas as the Head of Department's.

The second part in which irony is heavily shown is an example of "pretence irony", since the speaker (A) is imitating a lazy student in his way out of studying literature. I refer to: "I read a book last night and it...". The booster is placed here before the word "so", which is clearly done to emphasise and exaggerate the student's supposed enthusiasm with the book in order to cause a contradictory effect: the hearer infers that obviously the student was not moved at all and did not even read the book. The victims of irony here are the lazy students, who will always try to cheat the teacher if he allows them to do so. Indirectly, there is a second victim, namely the Head of Department, whose loose behaviour with the students would - according to A's views- cause these effects.

The third part of this example having a clear and identifiable ironic intention is "He's taken in by..." (in bold type), where there is some "boosting" before the word "soul" and before the first syllable of "Literature". The speaker is using

here religious register ("soul", "abiding faith in") with a twofold purpose: 1) to ironically point to the Head of Department's naive thoughts, and 2) to imply that the students are not any "dear souls" or any innocent "literature-faithful" beings. The boosting or pitch increase on "soul" and on "Literature" may serve to achieve these effects, together with other contextual and prosodic features (such as laughter and intonation). As can be observed, in most cases, the "boosting and the kinetic tones coincide on the same syllable, though there are some cases in which they do not, as in the last example ("literature" has a booster but no kinetic tone). This shows that pitch level can sometimes be independent of intonation and that it can alone be used as a prominence marker having ironic effects at the same time.

Other examples were found in which the booster was placed on other syllables than the one bearing the kinetic tone, as is the case in the following chunk of dialogue in which the speakers (two academics) are criticising another lecturer:

[2]

```

B 12 he ^l\ooked '[@:~] - com^pl\etely unrefl/ective#
B 11 as ^though he _just _had . [?] a !pattern in his
B 11 :h\ead# .
B 11 and . ((he)) ^ex"!p\ounded#
B 11 with ^great "!fl\uency#
B 11 at a ^moment's *!n\otice##
A 11 *^y\es##
A 11 ^y\es#
B 11 ^and as !though he 'wasn't 'really :c\onscious#
B 11 of ^what the !pattern !w\as#
B 11 he'd ((^been ex:p\ounding#))
B 11 ^that was the im":pr\ession *((he 'gave#))*
A 11 *^[\m]## .
A 11 ^[=m]# - -

```

B 11 ^spoke in !beautifully 'fluent \_French : \English#  
 A 20 ( - - laughs) .  
 B 11 it was ^quite f \unny#  
 B 11 if you ^trans!l\ated the 'words#  
 B 11 ^back !literally 'into :Fr \en ch#  
 B 11 you ^found the con'struction was :p \er'fect#  
 B 11 as ^far ((as)) . \_ (m \y 'French) could !t \ell# -  
 B 12 ((^kn \owledge of 'French \_which)) - - was ^rather  
 B 12 'strange ! \English# - - -  
 B 11 ^[\m]#  
 B 11 ^haven't \_thought of h/im#  
 B 11 for ^y \ears#  
 A 11 ( - - laughs) -

(LLC, S.1.6)

When B says that the lecturer spoke in "beautifully fluent French English", he is being ironic. The booster on the word "beautifully" (a modifier of "fluent") is strategically placed with a mocking intention. The prominence given to this word by the high pitch may, at the beginning (before hearing the word "French"), be thought of as a device used to stress and remark how well the lecturer spoke English, but as soon as he inserts the word "French", a contradiction arises, and the ironic meaning is worked out or inferred: his English was not beautifully fluent; he had a lot of interference from French.

All the foregoing suggests that in ironic utterances there is not only one prosodic feature working in isolation. In this particular section, we have seen how an increase in pitch level can work together with intonation and stress -the three features being present on the same syllable in some cases, or on different syllables or words in others- in order to distribute the prominence load along different strategic points in the utterance. But there are still other prosodic features which are worth examining, namely *laughter* and *silence/pauses*.

### 6.3.3 Laughter

In chapter 4, I wrote about the relationship of irony to humour. It could be noted that irony and some kinds of jokes are very closely related, and it was also shown how verbal irony generally elicits the external or "internal" laughter of one or more of the participants. Laughter is, thus, a feature which very frequently accompanies the phenomenon of verbal irony.

As may have already been noticed, the majority of the examples presented so far in this chapter include laughter or giggles strategically placed in connection with the ironic utterances. In some cases, it may be the laughter of the ironist to add one more clue to the ironic remark; in some others, it is the laughter of the hearer to show that he has understood the irony intended by the speaker. Devorah Tannen (1984), in her analysis of irony and joking in a conversation among friends, pinpoints the different ironic styles of two of her friends, and shows how one of them often follows his ironic comments with laughter (because his style is always dramatized through exaggerated enunciation and is mock tough, mock annoyed or mock solicitous) while the other never laughs after his ironic utterances (because his style is mock serious). The findings of Tannen's analysis tell us that many times laughter is an irony marker, but, on other occasions, the ironic speaker does not laugh precisely because he is simulating seriousness, and this requires a deadpan style, with no apparent prosodic features marking the irony: "Only the knowledge that the question was not

serious, and the deliberate, clipped quality make it clear that the answer is not meant seriously" (1984: 139).

Consider now the following example from the LLC, in which the same speakers of example [2] in the previous section (6.3.1) are criticising another lecturer:

[1]

A 11 . ^oh d\ear#  
A 12 ^what was 'he - ^I can't even re!member !what he  
A 12 was d/\oing#  
A 11 the ^day I :went to his :l\ecture#  
A 11 but ^I re!member that 'he - :brought 'out !thr\ee  
A 11 'things \_in# .  
A 11 "^\Old /English#  
A 12 ((^you !cl\assicists)) [??] ^you've \_probably not  
A 12 !d\one Old /English#  
A 11 ^h\ave 'you# -  
A 11 ^c\ourse you 'haven't# - -  
A 11 ^bin\_dan 'rin\_dan \_and w\in'dan#  
A 11 the ^three v\erbs#  
A 11 ^[?]all . ((are)) rh/ymin#  
A 11 ^and 'they !\all ((are)) :d=oin#  
A 11 with ^something 'going :r\ound#  
A 11 ^bin\_dan to b/ind#  
A 11 ^win\_dan to w\ind#  
A 11 and . ^rin'dan :to . "!\r\ind#  
A 11 you ^kn/ow#  
A 11 a ^p\ig#  
A,B 20 ( - - laugh)  
B 11 \*( - - - laughs)\* \*\*^[/\m]#\*\*  
A 11 \*\*^this is the !\only thing I've 'brought a!\way  
A 11 from that l/ecture#  
A 11 -\* - - I'm ^not quite 'sure what he was . trying  
A 11 \*\*to\*\* . pr\ove with th/em#  
A 11 ^when he'd !f\inished#  
A 20 (\*-\* - - laughs)  
B 20 \*( - laughs)\*

(LLC, S.1.6)

When A says that she is not quite sure what the lecturer "was trying to prove with them when he'd finished", she is using "mild" irony to mean that in fact she thinks the lecturer's classes were pointless and boring. I say "mild" irony because

the speaker uses a "hedge" ("not quite sure") when, in fact, she lets the hearer understand that she was sure that his classes were not interesting at all. A reinforces this idea with her laughter, and B also laughs to show that he understands and that he is her "accomplice" in the criticism.

In some particular cases, the laughter can be ironic (generally sarcastic) in itself, without the need of any linguistic clue. Consider the following dyad which could occur between two people, A and B. A (a woman) knows that B (her boyfriend) is a liar and that he does not love her (he has proved so after repeated actions showing lack of care and respect):

B: "I love you. Believe me."  
A: "Ha, Ha, Ha." (laughter)

In this case, the laughter means "that is not true and I don't believe you. You're a liar". The contradiction here lies in what the man says and what he really does, which makes A understand his utterance as having an opposite meaning to the literal one, namely, "I don't love you".

A similar example seems to be the following from LLC, in which a woman is talking about her teaching experience:

[2]

C 11 1and I've ^got about - !twenty \0-'level#  
C 11 1^b\oys#  
b 20 1yeah  
C 11 1who ^are . sort of . !!(M/iss) M/iss#  
C 11 1^they've de'cided to 'call me M\iss you s/ee#  
b 20 1yeah  
C 11 1[@m] . ^M\iss they say#  
C 11 1" ^wh\y#  
C 11 1do we ^have to 'study p\oetry 'Miss# -  
C 11 1^M\iss#  
b 20 1I see  
C 12 1and ^things they're ^great f\un#

C 11 1they ^ask too 'many :damn qu\estions#  
b 20 1\*( . laughs)\*  
C 11 1\*.\* you ^kn/ow#  
C 11 1but [@m] . they're ^all en!thusi\astic#  
C 11 1and they ^think I'm all r\ight#  
C 20 1\*( . laughs)\*

(LLC, S.7.1)

In this case, C is being sarcastic with herself, because she laughs at the fact that her students think "she is all right". The laughter shows the irony because what she means with it is that she believes her students are naive for believing so. In fact, what she thinks of herself is that she is not "all right". She is being critical of herself.

There is a great number of other examples in which laughter and/or giggles play an important part in the whole ironic meaning, but I will not include them here for the sake of redundancy. They will nevertheless be taken into account for the results section of this chapter, in which an account of the prosodic features accompanying irony will be made. I shall now turn to another of these features which seems to be meaningful when associated to irony. I refer to *silence* or *pauses* in the conversation.

#### 6.3.4 Silence and/or pauses

Many authors have directed their attention to the study of silence in discourse. Dennis Kurzon (1992), for example, claims that silence may mean power in some particular situations.

Kurzon concentrates on the silent response to a polar or wh-interrogative and tries to show that at times it is the silent person who uses his/her silence to gain control of the situation to attain power (1992: 93). Gray (1992), when analysing the "elements of assertive asking" states the following:

<<One of the key elements of assertive asking is to remain silent after you have asked for support. Allow your partner to work through their resistance. Be careful not to disapprove of his grumbles. As long as you pause and remain silent, you have the possibility of getting his support. If you break the silence you lose power.>> (1992: 268).

We have already seen how irony may be used by a person in power (chapter 5), and it is not impossible to conceive of a situation in which silence would be strategically used to be ironic and show power at the same time. In certain situations, a person may opt to not give a response to show or let his interlocutor infer that his question was so stupid that it is not worth answering. Indeed, Varol Akman reinforces this argument in his squib "When Silence may mean Derision" (1994). Akman asserts that in some instances silence can be understood as a speech act of the form "I will not participate in order to show people (the listeners or in general, others present) that you are a laughingstock" (1994: 213). Akman also explains that the circumstances in which "silence means derision" are generally distinguished by the existence of an "audience" in addition to a questioner and an addressee with a shared knowledge of the audience about the qualities of the addressee and the questioner. I believe the examples he gives can also be understood as ironic



silence and, for that reason, I shall quote one of them:

<<The setting is a country after a military coup. A famous professor of law (X) is being questioned in a military court. In the past he played a major role in the preparation of the constitution. X is now being accused of assisting the activities of a secret organization to destroy the nation's sovereignty. The judge (Y) builds her case on the allegation that X has violated a specific constitutional provision. When X objects to this claim and tries to demonstrate why there is no basis for the allegation, Y explodes: "What do you mean when you say that I'm misrepresenting or misreading the constitution? What makes you think that you know better?"

Surely X knows better! After all he was instrumental in drafting the entire constitution in its final form. X, nonetheless, just keeps silent>> (1994: 212)

Perhaps this example could be better explained by saying that X uses silence to implicitly mean derision or to ridicule others - as it is many times the case with verbal negative irony or sarcasm. But at the same time he wants to point to an instance of situational irony, namely, the fact that he is accused of misinterpreting the constitution when he in fact played a major role in its preparation.

If we think of this issue in terms of Brown & Levinson's Theory of Politeness, it can be said that silence may become an FTA in itself (as was anticipated in 5.4). Brown & Levinson pay attention to this fact in their note n° 64, in which they state:

<<A conversational viewpoint directs us also to the use of carefully located silence as a means of accomplishing an FTA even where our super-strategy 5 (Don't do the FTA at all) is enjoined. Thus in Tamil, polite acceptances may be conveyed by deliberate silences, as illustrated by the glosses in this passage (where A is a man, and W is his friend's new bride):

A: Do you sing?

W: (silence)

A: Hooray! Give us a song!  
 Similarly, in Tamil the politest refusal is simply no answer at all; hence if A writes to B for a favour and B does not reply, this signifies a polite refusal.>> (1987: 295)

Mc Carthy & Carter (1994) exemplify the use of silence as a deliberate strategy in the exercise of power, and subsequently note:

<<Deliberate suspension of a turn can be profoundly unsettling and can be as effective in the assertion of dominance as the refusal to allow a turn to someone else. Remaining silent can be construed as impolite, non-committal or threatening depending on our interpretation of that silence in the context of the particular sequence of dramatic exchanges... Pauses, too, can produce similar effects.>> (1994: 139)

In the LLC I have observed cases of meaningful silence realised in the form of longer or shorter pauses which are strategically placed within the piece of ironic discourse. Consider the following:

[1]

B 13 \*^well . !last ^last y\/ear\* we had a . we ^had a  
 B 13 d\inner#  
 B 11 ^no it was a :finalists' re!c\eption#  
 B 11 ^w\asn't it# .  
 B 11 in ^which !six f\inalists turned 'up# .  
 B 11 and ^every 'member of !st\aff#  
 VAR 20 ( - - - laugh)  
 A 11 [e] ^\every 'member of 'staff#  
 B 11 ^every 'member of :st\/aff turned 'up#  
 B 11 but ^only !six !f\inalists#  
 C 11 ^\oh +(^G\od#)#+  
 VAR 20 \*( - - - murmuring)\*  
 A 11 \*+( . coughs)+ well ^that 'wasn't so :g\ood#  
 A 11 ^w\as it#  
 A 20 [e:m]  
 B 12 the ^Christmas '[pa:] ((at)) the ^Christmas  
 B 12 :p\arty#  
 B 11 we ^((there was)) !stacks\* of :b\/ooze# .  
 B 11 and a^g\ain all the st/aff 'came#  
 B 11 +. and ((only)) ^one or two  
 B 11 'under!gr\aduates#;- - -+;  
 VAR 20 +( - - - laugh)+

C 20 +((6 to 8 sylls))+  
 A 11 you ^mean in lother w\ords#  
 A 11 in the [dhi: 'dhi:] the ^{b\usiness of [dhi:]}.  
 A 11 [dhi: 'dhi:] 'staff 'student rell\ations# .  
 A 12 ^it's it's ^not the !st\aff who are# .  
 A 11 ^who are \*. ((\_making a \_very \_poor b=usiness#))\*  
 B 11 \*^no n/\o#  
 B 11 it's ((6 to 8 sylls it's))\* the ^students :by and  
 B 11 :l\arge#

(LLC, S.3.3)

Pause is marked in the LLC by means of dashes (--). Each dash is a unit pause of one stress unit or "foot". Brief pauses (of one light syllable) are marked with a plus sign (+).

When B says that only one or two undergraduates came to the party, he apparently is not criticising them, but the contrast that is implicitly made of the undergraduates with all the members of the staff, together with the pauses after the word "undergraduates", give an ironic effect to his utterance. It is as if the speaker said: "I am not going to say anything else, so I will now keep silent in order for you to draw your own conclusions about the undergraduates' behaviour". The laughter of various participants of the conversation that comes immediately after the silence is also revealing: the listeners want to show that they received the message. Then A tries to explain the conveyed ironic meaning by expressing it "literally" (you mean, in other words...).

That silence can help convey and understand ironic meanings is not surprising if we consider that, in all cases (even when there are no pauses or silence), much of what is interpreted is what the speaker has not said, rather than what

he has said". The foregoing example can be considered an example of irony in which the speaker means what he says, but, in addition, tries to make his listeners understand that he means something else. I wrote about this kind of irony in chapters 2 and 3, to show that it could not always be said that the ironic speaker always meant "the opposite" of the literal meaning of his utterance.

Another example in which it seems that pauses play an important part in the ironic content is the following conversation between a couple, in which a man (b) is trying to mock his wife's obsession with buying everything at a very cheap price:

[2]

a	11	^let's have a 'nip d\own#
a	11	to ^Head'quarter and G\eneral#
a	11	((and)) ^see if they 'have 'anything in 'that .
a	11	sort of 'fifty-'nine b\ob# -
a	11	^two pound t/en 'range#
b	11	^r\ight# .
b	11	and the ^\other 'place to l/ook#
b	11	is ^on the 'back of a !W\eetabix#
a	21	( - laughs)
b	11	((a)) ^c\ornflake _packet# - - -
b	11	^((might)) have these !\offers# - - -
b	11	^ [=m]# .
b	11	[g] ^give \over#
b	20	( - - laughs) - - -

(LLC, S.1.4)

Again, the pauses here are made in order to let the hearer (in this case, the wife) understand that he means "more than what he is saying". He is laughing at his wife's intentions to buy a bed at so cheap a price and that is why he scornfully speaks of

---

<sup>7</sup> Verbal irony has, in fact, much to do with "insinuation", as defined by Bertuccelli Papi (1996).

"finding an offer at the back of a Weetabix cornflake packet".

Finally, I consider it appropriate to include an example from *The Golden Girls* scripts (though, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, it will not be considered in the final account of cases of prosodic features) in which a timely pause "says more" than if the speaker had actually spoken. The girls are here talking about how Blanche and Sophia were cheated by a man and a woman (who was dressed as a nun):

[3] Rose: You two were victims of the oldest confidence game going: the pigeon drop.

Blanche: But he just seemed so honest,

Rose: Well, that's why it's called a confidence game. I mean, he has to win your confidence or you wouldn't put up the money.

Sophia: It wasn't his idea -the nun suggested it.

Rose: She was part of the team. They always work in pairs.

Sophia: I don't know what the church is coming to. I thought it stopped with Bingo.

Rose: That was no nun. I work for a consumer protection show. We've been warning people about this for months. Once these scamsters have your money in an envelope, they make a switch and you wind up with worthless paper. They prey on the old and gullible.

Blanche: Are you calling me gullible?

Rose: No, ---- . (silence)

(GG, 1991: 229)

This silence, which is strategically placed after the "no", serves to "trigger" the implicature that Rose was calling her "old", and thus has an ironical effect because, although Rose seems to be answering that Blanche is not gullible and, consequently, appears to be kind to her, she is at the same time

calling her old, which creates a clash of intentions and suddenly makes Rose become "not so kind".

In view of all this, it becomes clear that there is more than one prosodic feature that can be said to be present and help the process of conveying and interpreting ironic utterances. I have analysed those which seem to be more prominent and important in the corpus, although I am conscious of the fact that there are other features which could have been analysed, such as nasalisation or breathy voice (which are also used to convey ironic meanings -see Tannen (1984)-). I have not included them in my study because they are not marked in the LLC. This is precisely one of the criticisms that could be made of the LLC, namely, that not all prosodic features are duly marked.

I shall now proceed to show the results of the survey made in this part of my work, whose purpose was to measure the frequency of occurrence of each of these features in ironic utterances.

#### 6.4 The Survey

##### 6.4.1 Account and Results

After the analysis of the prosodic features in some of the examples in the corpus, and in order to give more accurate answers to my research questions in this chapter, it was considered necessary to quantify the occurrences of such features so as to be able to make judgements and draw conclusions based on their frequency of occurrence. For that purpose, a data base

was created. The variables taken into account were those prosodic features that were found together with the ironic utterances analysed with certain frequency. Specifically, I refer to a) Tone, b) Stress, c) High pitch, d) Laughter/giggles and e) Meaningful silence/pauses. These were, then, the dependent variables of this piece of research, the independent variable being given by the eighty-six instances of ironic utterances found in the LLC corpus.

#### 6.4.1.1 Tone

To keep up with the order followed in the analysis, I shall first refer to the results of the survey with respect to Tone. The procedure carried out consisted in counting the times each of the tones occurred in the 86 examples of ironic discourse found in the LLC. This was not an easy task, considering that irony many times extends to more than one tone group and even to more than one sentence; however, the tone taken into account was that which occurred in the sentence (or sometimes only the tone group) containing the clearer and heavier ironic load.

The results of such an account are shown in table 6.1 and Figures 6a and 6b, where the numbers have to be considered in relation to a total of 86 (eighty-six) occurrences.

Notice that, within the tones used by the speakers in the ironic utterances -in a scale from the most frequent to the least frequent- the order is the following:

1- Fall, 2- Fall-rise, 3- Rise, 4- Rise-Fall, 5- Level.

6.4.1.2 Other prosodic features: Stress, high Pitch, laughter/giggles and meaningful silence/pauses

The next step in the survey was to count the number of times that the other prosodic features (stress, high pitch, laughter or giggles and meaningful silence or pauses) occurred at strategic points in the ironic utterances studied.

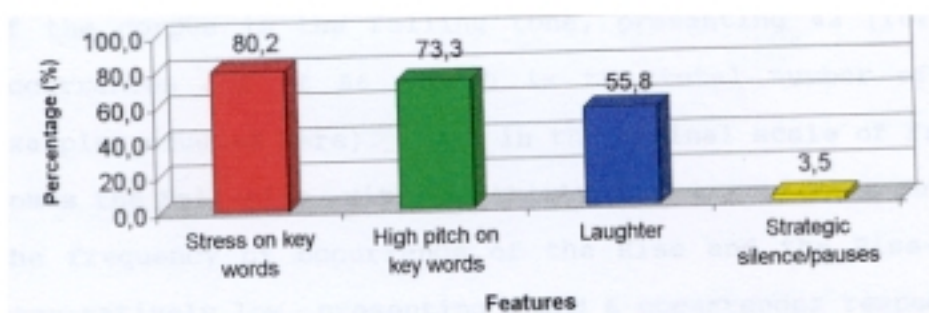
It is important to note here that, contrary to the case of the Tone variable (where only one tone occurs for each example), the occurrence of one feature does not exclude the occurrence of any of the others, and that is why the number of occurrences for each feature cannot be summed up to reach a total of 86. All these features can co-occur in only one instance of ironic discourse.

Table 6.2 and figure 6c show the number and percentage of occurrences of the prosodic features with respect to the total number of ironic utterances. In this table and this figure, it can be observed that both *stress* and *high pitch* on key words are rather frequent phenomena (80.23% and 73.3% of occurrences respectively). Laughter and/or giggles seem to be a frequent feature too. Forty-eight of the examples analysed had explicit laughter or giggles included as a prosodic feature. Meaningful ironic silence or pauses have proved not to be a frequent feature, representing 3.5% of the total number of occurrences of ironic utterances.



**Table 6.2. Percentage of occurrences of the prosodic features (other than intonation) intervening in the ironic utterances in the corpus**

FEATURES	Stress on key words	High pitch on key words	Laughter	Strategic silence/pauses	Total
Percentage	80,2	73,3	55,8	3,5	100
Occurrences	69	63	48	3	86



**Fig. 6c. Bar chart**

#### 6.4.2 Discussion of the results

As was anticipated, this survey intends to be neither a definitive nor an exhaustive study of the prosodic features used and understood by speakers and hearers of verbal irony. However, it is viewed as a useful analysis to clarify the topic to a certain extent. As table 6.1 and figures 6a and 6b show, the tone which is most frequently used in the ironic utterances of the corpus is the falling tone, presenting 42 (forty two) occurrences out of 86 (which is the total number of ironic examples studied here). Next in the ordinal scale of frequency comes the Fall-rise, with 31 (thirty-one) occurrences out of 86. The frequency of occurrence of the Rise and the Rise-fall is comparatively low, presenting 7 and 6 occurrences respectively. The level tone was not present on the key words of any of the examples analysed for this survey, though its possibility of occurrence is not discarded.

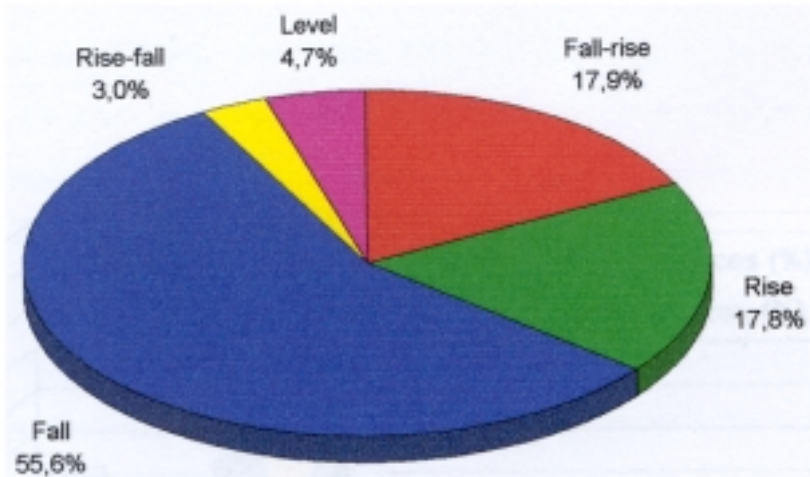
It can be observed, then, that the tones that seem most likely to occur in ironic utterances are the fall (48% of occurrences) and the fall-rise (36% of occurrences), which together make up 84% of the total number of occurrences. But this tendency towards the use of fall-rise and fall in ironic utterances would prove to be more valid -according to statistical standards- if it were somehow different from the general tendency of tones used in English in non-ironic utterances. In other words, we might find that the tones most frequently used in English for all kinds of utterances are the fall or the fall-

rise, and thus the same tendency found for irony would not reveal anything in particular as regards the intonation of ironic utterances. If, on the contrary, it is found that the tendency for non-ironic utterances is other than the one found for ironic ones, then we shall be able to speak of a particular intonation used by ironic speakers. With that idea in mind, and following Prof. Craig Chaudron's advice (1995, personal communication), I carried out a statistical account of the tones used in the non-ironic utterances of the same corpus (LLC). This was made on a random basis, using the table of random numbers for the selections of the pages to be surveyed in each of the texts. The results can be examined in table 6.3 and figures 6d and 6e. The total number of tone groups counted for this analysis was 2,045 (two thousand and forty-five) of which 1,157 (one thousand, one hundred and fifty-seven) were falls, 367 (three hundred and sixty-seven) were fall-rises, 363 (three hundred and sixty-three) were rises, 61 (sixty-one) were rise-falls and 97 (ninety-seven) were level tones.

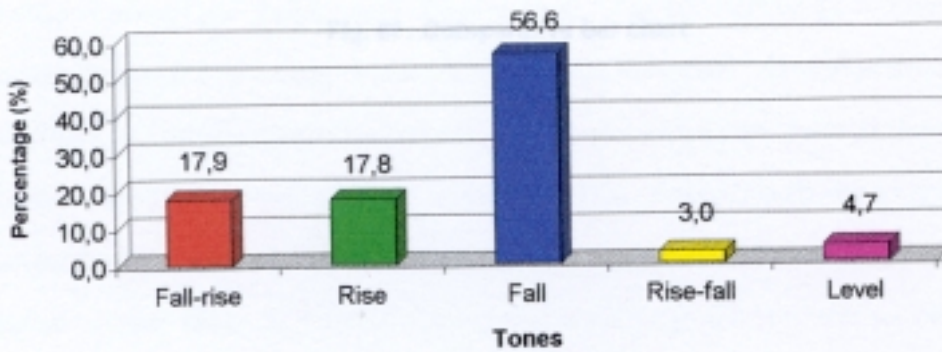
Table 6.4 and figure 6f illustrate the comparative study of the occurrences of the different tones for both ironic and non-ironic utterances.

**Table 6.3. Percentage of occurrence of the different tones within the non-ironic utterances in the corpus.**

TONES	Fall-rise	Rise	Fall	Rise-fall	Level	Total
Percentage	17,9	17,8	56,6	3,0	4,7	100
Occurrence	367	363	1157	61	97	2045



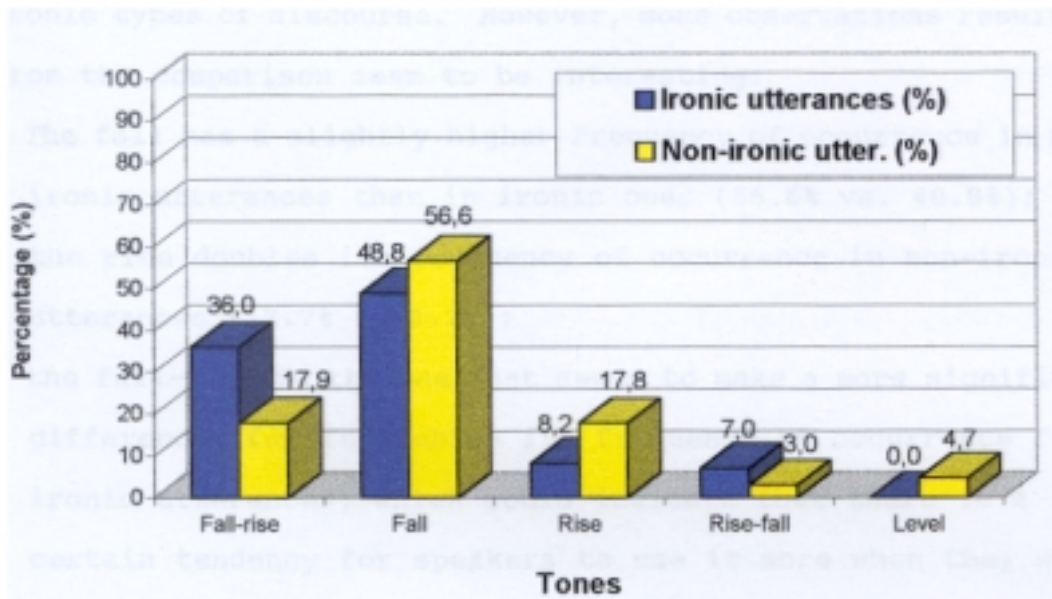
**Fig. 6d. Pie chart**



**Fig. 6e. Bar chart**

**Table 6.4. Comparison of the frequencies of occurrence of the different tones in the ironic & non-ironic utterances in the LLC corpus.**

TONES	Fall-rise	Fall	Rise	Rise-fall	Level	Total
Ironic utterances (%)	36,0	48,8	8,2	7,0	0,0	100
Non-ironic utter. (%)	17,9	56,6	17,8	3,0	4,7	100



**Fig. 6f . Comparative bar chart**

The results of the account and of the comparison of occurrences of the different tones yield the following information about the tones of the utterances of the corpus studied:

- First and foremost, both the falling and falling-rising tones appear to be the most widely used ones in both ironic and non-ironic types of discourse. However, some observations resulting from the comparison seem to be interesting:
- \* The fall has a slightly higher frequency of occurrence in non-ironic utterances than in ironic ones (56.6% vs. 48.8%);
- \* the rise doubles its frequency of occurrence in non-ironic utterances (17.7% vs 8.2%);
- \* the fall-rise is the one that seems to make a more significant difference, for it doubles its frequency of occurrence for ironic utterances, which could indicate that there is a certain tendency for speakers to use it more when they want to be ironic than when they do not;
- \* both the rise-fall and the level tones have low rates of occurrence in both ironic and non-ironic discourse. The slight differences between the percentages for these tones do not appear to be significant. The fact that there are no occurrences of level tones in the particular examples analysed here does not discard its probability of occurrence, for, in fact, the intuitions of native speakers tell that the level tone can also be used in ironic utterances (Craig Chaudron, 1995: personal communication);
- \* the  $\chi^2$  (chi square) results show that the tone variable has an

incidence on ironic utterances, i.e., there is a significant difference in the use of tones between ironic and non-ironic discourse. Thus, one part of the hypothesis laid out at the beginning of this survey can be confirmed, in the sense that there is not only one specific or particular tone for ironic utterances, although the frequency of distribution of the different tones is different, and consequently it can be said that ironic and non-ironic utterances do not behave in the same manner with respect to tone distribution. In other words, the null hypothesis is not confirmed: there is a significant difference between ironic and non-ironic language with respect to tone. (See Appendix 4, "Chi-squared test" for Hypothesis n°11).

In some cases, a particular tone co-occurs with heavy stress and an increase of pitch on one or some of the key ironic words, as well as with laughter and/or giggles. It has been found (analysing the distribution of features in the data base) that, in some cases, all the features studied here co-occur, though, in some others, the only prosodic feature apparent is tone (see Appendix 1, b). In any case, there is always at least one prosodic feature which helps to give special prominence to certain key words or pieces of discourse, to the point that in some situations even *silence* can be a means of providing prosodic prominence with ironic intentions.

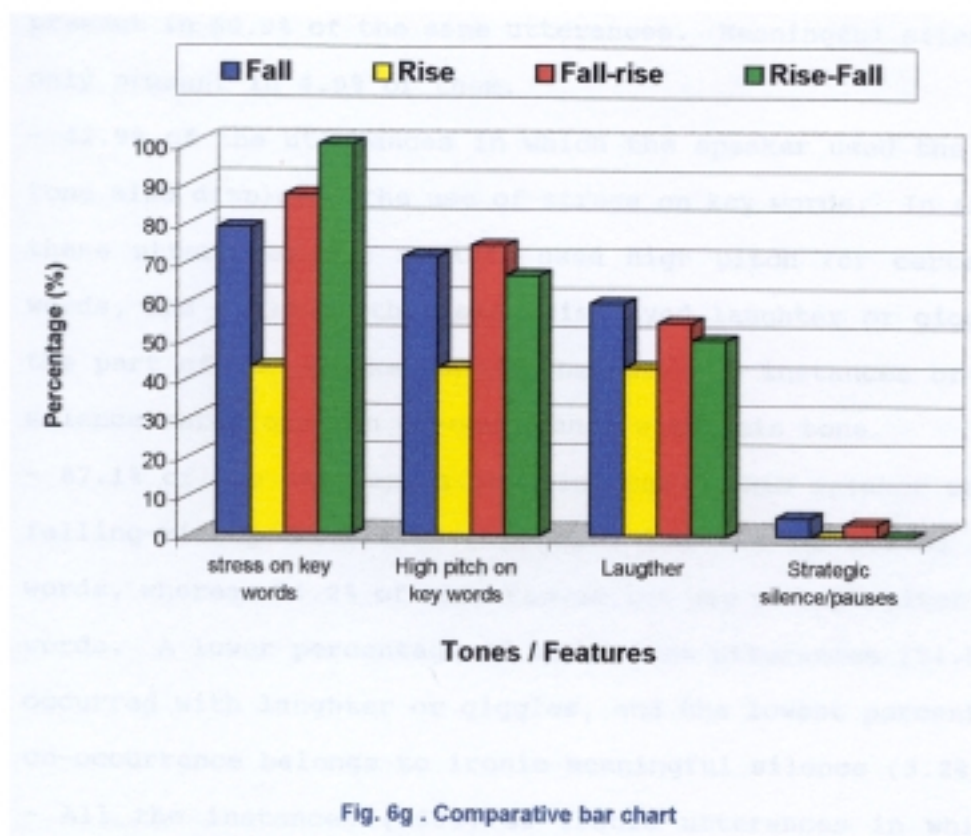
Table 6.5 and Figure 6g shows the cross-tabulation of the variables, which provides a quantification of the variables

that co-occur. The vertical axis contains the different tones. The horizontal axis, the other prosodic features studied. This table permits a clearer view of the possible correlations between tone and the occurrence of other prosodic features.



Table 6.5. Percentage of occurrence of each of the prosodic features with respect to the different tones (cross-tabulation).

TONES / FEATURES	stress on key words	High pitch on key words	Laughther	Strategic silence/pauses
Fall	78,6	71,4	59,5	4,8
Rise	42,9	42,9	42,9	0,0
Fall-rise	87,1	74,2	54,5	3,2
Rise-Fall	100,0	66,6	50,0	0,0



The cross-tabulation of the variables (table 6.5 and Fig. 6g) leads the researcher to make the following observations:

- 78.6% of the ironic utterances in which the speaker used the falling tone displayed also a use of stress on key words. 71.5% of the same utterances contained key words uttered on a higher pitch than the rest of the words of the utterance. Laughter was present in 60.9% of the same utterances. Meaningful silence was only present in 4.9% of them.

- 42.9% of the utterances in which the speaker used the rising tone also displayed the use of stress on key words. In 42.9% of these utterances the speaker used high pitch for certain key words, and 42.9% of them also displayed laughter or giggles on the part of the speaker and/or hearer. No instances of ironic silence were found in co-occurrence with this tone.

- 87.1% of the utterances in which the ironic speaker used the falling-rising tone also displayed the use of stress on key words, whereas 74.2% of them showed the use of high pitch on key words. A lower percentage of these same utterances (54.5%) co-occurred with laughter or giggles, and the lowest percentage of co-occurrence belongs to ironic meaningful silence (3.2%).

- All the instances (100%) of ironic utterances in which the speaker used the rising-falling tone also contained the use of stress on key words. Only in 66.6% of them was high pitch used for key words, and, in 50% of these utterances, the speakers laughed during or after the ironic comment. No occurrences (0%) of ironic silence were registered in connection with this tone.

The foregoing information leads us to the following

conclusions:

- All the features studied can co-occur with any of the tones, except for ironic silence, which, in the instances analysed here did not appear in relation to the rise and the rise-fall. In any case, ironic silence -though a possible variable- does not seem to be a frequent prosodic feature in connection with irony.
- Stress on key words occurs more frequently in connection with the rise-fall, the fall-rise and the fall, and not so frequently with the rise.
- High pitch tends to be used more frequently in connection with the fall and the fall-rise. Its appearance in connection with the rise-fall has been less frequent, and even less frequent in connection with the rise.
- Laughter and/or giggles appear more frequently in those utterances in which the speaker uses the falling tone and the fall-rise, and less frequently in those in which the rise-fall or the rise is used.
- Except for the case of silence, there are no remarkable differences that could tell us that one prosodic feature is more important than any other when it comes to conveying ironic meanings. This seems to be in agreement with the hypothesis underlying this study, i.e. that there is no specific "tone" for ironic utterances and that other prosodic features can be used in combination with the tones to yield the so-called "ironic tone of voice". In some cases, as was the case with examples n° 40 and 77 (see Appendix 1, a), "tone" was the only prosodic feature considered necessary by the speaker to accompany his ironic

utterance. In these two particular cases, the falling-rising tone was used, a fact that might lead us to conclude that when the fall-rise is used, no other feature is necessary to understand the irony. But the evidence of the data rejects this conclusion, for, in most cases in which the fall-rise was used, there were other prosodic features working with it. Besides, there is another case in which the only prosodic feature used by the speaker is tone, namely, example n° 66, and the tone used here is the fall, not the fall-rise. However, there might be other prosodic clues given by the speaker in this utterance but not registered in the transcription of the corpus (I have already noted that there are some features like nasalisation or breathy voice that are not marked in the LLC but that could be irony markers).

In any case, the results of this survey do not allow the researcher to conclude that intonation is a sufficient condition to determine whether a given utterance is ironic or not. The results better tell us that different combinations of different prosodic features are used by different ironic speakers in different situations. The network of relationships and combinations is complex, and it ultimately depends upon other features of the whole context of the utterance. Thus, syntactic, semantic, social and prosodic contexts work together to conform the whole pragmatic event of ironic communication.

In order to have a knowledge of the tendencies of combination of the different features studied here, a statistical analysis of the possible combinations was made. All the possible

combinations with their number of occurrences in the ironic examples studied in this survey are shown in Appendix 1, b. This statistical analysis tells us that the most frequent combinations of prosodic features for cases of verbal irony are the following (in order of importance)

- 1- Fall-rise + Stress on key words + High Pitch on key words + Laughter
- 2- Fall + Stress on key w. + High Pitch on k.w. + Laughter
- 3- Fall + Stress on k.w. + High Pitch on k.w.
- 4- Fall-rise + Stress on k.w. + High Pitch on k.w.

As can be seen, the statistical analysis of the combinations shows the tendency of ironic utterances towards the use of tones Fall and Fall-rise together with stress on key words, high pitch on key words and laughter or stress and high pitch only, combinations that display the highest number of occurrences. Other combinations are also possible, but not so frequent, which seems, consequently, to indicate precisely what was suspected at the beginning of this survey, namely, that it is not only the tone used which determines the "ironic tone of voice", but also other prosodic features like high pitch or stress on key words.

All the foregoing suggests that prosodic features are an important part of the pragmatic meaning of ironic utterances, which seems to be a sensible conclusion, but, immediately after all this analysis, another secondary research question naturally arises: If prosodic features are important for the expression and interpretation of irony, what about *written* verbal irony? In other words, can we say that written ironic discourse has

attached to it certain prosodic features that distinguish it from other types of discourse? I shall try to answer, or, at least, to discuss this question in the following section.

### 6.5 Prosodic features and written verbal irony

On a first and unreflected view, it may seem absurd and contradictory to speak of the "prosodic features" of written discourse. However, some studies seem to suggest that this is not so absurd. Keith Allan notes that "in writing, prosody is somewhat grossly represented by punctuation, underlining, capitalization, italization, etc." (1986: 58). Moreover, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that, when reading any type of discourse, the context will help the reader to imagine and/or deduce "how" this piece of discourse should be read aloud, i.e., which prosodic features to use. Crystal & Davy write about "the phonology that underlies the written form of newspaper reporting", and, although they consider that it is not normally stylistically significant, they acknowledge that "certain 'auditory effects' can be found, which presumably reverberate mentally" (1969: 180).

In a study contrasting discourse modes or "genres", Johns-Lewis (1986) examined pitch fundamental frequency (Fo) tendencies in three discourse modes: reading, acting and conversation. The evidence from this study showed that long-term pitch characteristics are significantly different in the three discourse modes selected: the Fo band occupied by the three

discourse modes is narrowest for conversation and widest for acting, with reading aloud being intermediate between the two (1986: 212). For the purposes of the research question concerning written irony, this study is not very revealing, but it makes us aware of the fact that when reading a written text aloud, the pitch of the voice tends to be higher than in normal conversation.

El-Menoufy (1988) explains that in normal conversation the selection of the final lexical word in a tone group as tonic is the "unmarked" normal or neutral selection. On the contrary, the selection of a non-final lexical word or a non-lexical word as tonic is referred to as the "marked" selection, and is interpreted as the selection that indicates a presupposition relation (1988: 13). In the research done herein, it has been observed that the ironic writer may use different strategies to make the reader consider a given word as important and prominent, and, in this way, he may make the reader "shift" the tonic syllable "mentally" from the last lexical word in the tone group (unmarked position) to some other lexical or non-lexical word. In many of the newspaper articles examined, for example, the word carrying the heaviest ironic load is put between inverted commas. Crystal & Davy (1969) point out that inverted commas in the language of newspaper reporting are used for a variety of functions, one of them being to spotlight certain terms to which the author wants to give special prominence (1969: 179). This fact can be seen in the following comment made by Josh Young in the Sunday Telegraph, in which he writes about a religious sect

called "Scientology":

- [1] <<The Church of Scientology, founded by the late science-fiction writer, L. Ron Hubbard, has no God and its only declared goal is personal happiness. It teaches that humans are actually "thethans", creatures from another planet banished to earth 75 million years ago by their cruel ruler. They can only free themselves from evil influences by taking expansive courses of "enlightenment" invented by Hubbard -courses which made him a multi-millionaire.>>

(NA, January 15, 1994: 2)

The use of the inverted commas for the word "enlightenment" seems to have changed the tonic syllable from the final lexical word in the tone group ( which would be *Hubbard*) to the previous lexical word (*enlightenment*). According to El-Menoufy, the post-tonic items are given and recoverable, as is the case here with *Hubbard*, who was mentioned before at the beginning of the article. The word "enlightenment" is thus the one that is made prominent, in this case with an ironic intention, because it is evident that the writer does not think that those courses involve any enlightenment at all. The fact that these courses have made Hubbard a multi-millionaire reinforces the irony intended by the writer, if we consider that religion or church is something that is, or at least should be, associated with spirituality.

El-Menoufy explains that the unmarked predictable selection for the tonic syllable is the one that one would choose if one was asked to read out an isolated sentence, i.e., one that is out of context (1988: 13), which logically seems to suggest that when the context is available, the reader may be led to



change the tonic item or focus<sup>a</sup>, depending on the meanings conveyed, even when no inverted commas, italics or any other explicit indications are given by the writer.

The writer of ironic discourse, then, may use a great number of strategies to make his reader understand the intended meaning, one of which can be the use of inverted commas, bold type, italics, etc., and this may also give clues as to the intonation or prosodic features to be used by the reader. Another possible strategy for a writer is the choice of vocabulary. Carter (1988) tries to show "the degrees of neutrality or bias which are inscribed in the choice of words which reporters make" (1988: 8). Carter explains that, many times, journalists deviate from the use of "core" vocabulary (i.e., "the most normal, basic and simple words available to a language user, those elements in the lexical network of language which are unmarked" (1988: 9)) in order to show they are neither neutral nor objective. The use of non-core words may thus clearly show an attitude on the part of the writer. If we make a connection of this information with ironic discourse, it follows that when a writer wants to show sarcasm or irony to express a given attitude, he may include non-core words in his writing to that effect. As to the connection of this issue to prosodic features, it might be hypothesised that the use of a non-core word may make the reader direct his attention to that word and, consequently, give some kind of prosodic prominence to

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<sup>a</sup> Although the focus does not always coincide with the tonic syllable. See Martínez Caro (1995), Dick (1989), Siervieraka (1991).

it. More descriptive work is needed to test such a hypothesis, and it is not the intention of this study to go deeper into such an analysis. However, I consider it appropriate to include here two examples of written irony in which the strategy of using non-core vocabulary is found. The choice of some non-core words made by Russell in the following passage is made on purpose, in order to show his derogatory attitude towards religion:

- [2] <<I should not wish to be taught in earnest only when I am solemn. There are many things that seem to me important to be said, but not best said in a portentous tone of voice. Indeed, it has become increasingly evident to me that portentousness is often, though not always, a device for warding off too close scrutiny. I cannot believe in "sacred" truths. Whatever one may believe to be true, one ought to be able to convey without any apparatus of Sunday sanctification.>>

(BR, 1958: 100)

The use of non-core words and phrases such as "portentous/ness" or "apparatus of Sunday sanctification" helps the reader identify Russell's ironic tone. He is also making use of the inverted commas strategy with the word "sacred", which may make it become tonic, and, consequently, a marked option, whereas the unmarked option would place the tonic syllable on the word "truths". In this way, the reader will readily understand that what is sacred for other people is not sacred for Russell, and consequently he is mocking and being ironic about such an idea.

In the following excerpt from *The Sunday Times*, Jonathan Marolis shows his scepticism in connection with the so-called "intelligent buildings". He has previously stated that people get confused in such buildings, for, although they are

designed to be slaves to man, "it is sometimes not clear who is boss". He then explains that once he tried to switch on a light, but he pressed a red button and "succeeded in calling the fire brigade". Finally, he notes:

[3]           <<As I approached a chair-type device with some trepidation, wondering if it would turn out to be connected to the cooker, or the police station, I asked a university professor who was showing me round, what it was. "That" he pronounced gravely, "is a normal chair".>>

(NA, November 5, 1993: 2)

The language used by this journalist is biased. The fact that he is not being objective with the subject of his writing can be noticed by analysing the strategies he uses. One of these strategies is employing non-core vocabulary, as is the case with "a chair-type device", which will surely call the attention of the reader, and, consequently, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the reader will give some kind of prominence to this noun-phrase, a prominence that would not be present if the word had been merely "chair". The irony of this passage has also been attained through the strategy of "exaggeration" or "overstatement", which has already been discussed in chapter 5.

The above discussion and analysis of examples have led me to conclude that, even though prosodic features are normally thought of in connection with spoken discourse, they are not absent in written discourse. Writers have developed strategies to mark these features in their writing, and in certain conditions these strategies can also be used to give an ironic tone to the text.

I find it suitable to close this section by quoting Booth (1974) in one observation made in his book *A Rhetoric of Irony*:

<<In spoken ironies, especially in conversation, we are accustomed to catching a variety of clues that are not in themselves ironic -direct nudges of the elbow and winks of the eye. In written irony the same kind of nudge is sometimes given -often to the distress of readers who prefer to work things out on their own.>>

(1974: 53)

### 6.6 Summary and conclusions of the chapter

In this chapter, I have tried to clarify and analyse the relationship between irony and some prosodic features that accompany the phenomenon. Twenty texts from the London Lund Corpus (containing sixty-four sub-texts) have been examined, in which 86 (eighty-six) instances of ironic discourse were found. An account of the different prosodic features accompanying these examples has been made, as well as an analysis of the pragmatic meanings involved in the use of such prosodic phenomena.

The results of the analysis showed that the most frequently used tones for ironic utterances were the Fall and the Fall-rise, although the Rise and the Rise-fall also occurred in a lower percentage of the cases. This preponderance of the Fall and the Fall-rise proved to be valid also for non-ironic utterances (after the statistical analysis of the sample of non-ironic discourse), which could then mean that the preponderance of these two tones in ironic utterances does not say anything in

particular of such utterances, for they do not differ from the normal tendency of all utterances in English. However, the percentage of Fall-rises used in non-ironic discourse proved to be much lower than that of ironic discourse, a figure that shows that there is a certain tendency for ironic speakers to use this tone more frequently. This is basically the conclusion drawn from applying the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical test: there exists a difference between ironic and non-ironic discourse with respect to frequency of use of the different tones.

But this study has also thrown some light on certain prosodic features other than tone, which I believe helped to clarify to a certain extent what the elements of the so-called "ironic tone of voice" are. These other features analysed were: *stress* on key words, *high pitch* on key words, *laughter/giggles*, and *meaningful silence/pauses*. The statistical analysis of the possibilities of combinations of these features with the different tones showed that there is a tendency for ironic speakers to use the tones Fall and Fall-rise together with stress on key words, high pitch on key words and laughter, or to use the same tones only with stress and pitch on key words. These combinations displayed the highest number of occurrences. Other combinations proved to be sometimes used by ironic speakers (see Appendix 1, b), though not with so much frequency.

All the foregoing suggests that, as had been suspected at the beginning of the survey, it is not only the tone used which determines the "ironic tone of voice", but also other prosodic features, and all of them together contribute to the

interpretation of the ironic utterances as such. No one of these features can be labelled as the prosodic feature exclusively occurring in ironic utterances; rather, it seems more sensible to speak of a certain "collaboration" of two or more of them in most cases. The co-occurrence of these features is neither completely predictable nor random. It varies depending on the situation, the speakers, etc..

After the survey carried out in this chapter, it can be stated that prosodic features constitute one more of the strategies the ironic speaker has at his disposition in order to make his point, and that a varied and very rich network of relationships can be woven among these features. This network is surely rather intricate in most cases; I have tried to discover and to describe only some of the possible combinations. My intention has been to find a clearer explanation for the function and frequency of use of certain features which proved to be present in the examples of verbal irony in the corpus.

It is important to note that not all possible prosodic features have been quantified and analysed in this survey. Cases of nasalisation or breathy voice (which have also been identified by some linguists as irony markers) for example, have not been counted, simply because these features are not marked in the corpus used for the survey. I understand that the features not studied here may be as important as the ones that have been studied, and I am conscious of the fact that all these features are also many times correlated with such non-verbal factors as use of broad facial expressions and gestures, as well as with

kinesic proximity and touching during talk. I agree with Tannen in that "any device can be used to varying degrees, and each person's style is made up of a unique combination of devices" (1984: 146), although, as I have been able to confirm after the statistical analysis, certain tendencies in these combinations can be identified.

Finally, a brief discussion about the "implicit" presence of prosodic features in written ironic discourse was made. The general conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that the ironic writer generally gives his reader clues as to how his writing should be read aloud, be it by means of "graphic" elements (such as inverted commas, italisation, etc.), by the use of non-core words or expressions, or by means of other features of the context that can help the reader know which word or words should be made prominent.

I hope this chapter has helped to see another aspect of irony in a clearer light, and to understand that prosodic features are another of the "tools" or strategies that ironic speakers can dispose of. These and other strategies have been found and scrutinised all throughout the chapters written hitherto, but they still seem to form part of a "chaos". I shall try hereinafter to organise this "chaos" by classifying the different types of verbal irony (chapter 7), by proposing a taxonomy of ironic strategies (chapter 8), and, later, by analysing the functions fulfilled by these strategies and proposing a taxonomy of such functions (chapter 9). All this, I believe, will present a clearer approach to the problem.

**ABRIR CAPÍTULO 7 TOMO I**

